

▶ TRYING TO MAKE MY musical trajectory sound relevant or interesting to anyone else is such a difficult and humiliating task. I'm just a guy. Nothing about me feels more or less special than any other guy. In my experience so far, I haven't felt the need to say all that much, beyond the music I make, for people to get an idea about who I am. So forgive me if this piece doesn't immediately strike you as Pulitzer-worthy. I literally have no idea what I'm doing. But that's also true for me about making music. I've never had any training or lessons, just a willingness to fail and try again.

I grew up in Barrie, Ontario, which, today, is a city, but in the 1980s, it was a small town built around Lake Simcoe. It had a lot going for it. Most people worked at the General Tire plant or the Molson Brewery. It had a nice downtown with an arcade, a pizza parlor and a record store. My mother was working most of the time, so I had a lot of freedom. Having a bicycle made anything possible back then, and I used it to its fullest potential. I'd leave the house in the morning with no snacks, no water, no plan and definitely no phone. I'd have no idea where I was going. Usually, I'd end up just roaming around, trying to track down my neighborhood friends. Maybe they were at Shear Park playing tag, maybe they were at King Edward School playing basketball or maybe they were in the gully building a fort out of garbage lumber from the construction site nearby.

The small world I lived in felt so infinite back then. Now, I think Barrie is referred to as a "bedroom community." Like a lot of cities in southern Ontario, most people who live there work in Toronto. It was a great place to be a child, though I don't think I would ever go back. In fact, I don't even have family there anymore.

My best friend back then was named Travis. He lived with his adopted mother in the trailer park nearby. He'd had a rough go

EARLY LIFE AND FINDING MUSIC

Bahamas' creative force look back on bedroom community where he first discovered Guns N' Roses and Run-DMC

By
AFIE JURVANEN

with life up to that point, but he was always smiling, joking and laughing. He was (and still is) just a fun person to be around. We used to hang at his place most of the time, largely because he had cable and junk food. We would watch *Unsolved Mysteries* with his mother while she chain-smoked or we would sit in his room and listen to music. It was so small, basically a closet, and he had so much stuff packed in there—a single bed, WWF wrestling figures, video games and, most important, this janky ass Yorx boombox with a cassette deck. And he had a lot of tapes.

I don't think I'd even noticed that music existed until I started hanging out with him. Sure, I would occasionally hear songs in the car or at the grocery store, but it just didn't register. And I don't remember my mom playing music at home until I was a teenager.

In Travis' bedroom, I heard things for the first time that really got my attention. We would listen to Guns N' Roses' *Appetite for Destruction* on repeat. I remember the artwork had this cartoon drawing of a young woman who was in some sort of terrible state—like she had been drugged or violated—slouched down against a wall with one breast exposed. Just thinking about it now makes me feel weird. I was so confused by it. How did that cartoon relate to this music? Who are these skull caricatures on the cover? Is this the jungle that I'm being welcomed to? I was 7 years old, looking at a menacing cartoon robot, listening to "Paradise City" and "Sweet Child O' Mine"—talk about WTF?

It's amazing that I'm not more fucked up than I am. But, I guess the 7 year olds of today are listening to "WAP" and the 7 year olds of the 1950s

had Elvis' hips to contend with. Most of us seem to survive exposure to artistic indecency at any age, during any era. Art and music are ways of communicating, ways of expressing. I understood that then, even if I didn't understand exactly what the art and music were trying to express.

The first tape I actually bought with my own money was Run-DMC's *Raising Hell*. It sounded so raw—so hard—and it actually had a lot of guitar on it. The cover was purple and green, and the photo was out of focus—they looked way cooler in their leather puffer jackets than Slash did in his leather pants. I had no idea what rap was, no idea what New York City was, but the music still reached me, still moved me.

I'm sometimes jealous of my friends that grew up on The Beatles. That just sounds like a more wholesome, more nourishing musical diet—timeless songwriting, harmony singing, four lads from Liverpool and all that. Was I raised on musical junk food? It doesn't seem to matter in the slightest. I still got here, with an appreciation for it all.

Today, I listen to music from every era—and appreciate every genre—and I don't try half as hard to figure out what it's about. I just like it or I don't. Humans have a beautiful and terrifying way of intellectualizing everything, not always for the better. We'll ask ourselves, "Do I need to know why I like it or is liking it enough?" Those are more relevant questions to me now.

The music I make today probably owes more to Run-DMC than it does to Guns N' Roses. I usually lean into the more elemental parts of music, rather than trying to maximize every sonic square inch of the mix. Still, I'm grateful for it all—even the ugly bits. There's so many ugly bits. **1**

Afie Jurvanen records as Bahamas. He released his latest set, the country-inspired *Bootcut*, on Sept. 15.

