

The work and history of green day music essay



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“ It’s something unpredictable, but in the end it’s right. I hope you had the time of your life.” Most people have heard this song on the radio at some point or another as it gets played frequently. This is one of Green Day’s biggest hits called “ Good Riddance,” from the album Nimrod. Every Green Day fan at some point must have wondered how Green Day went from being a local band filling tiny clubs with a few hundred fans to an international best-selling band filling huge stadiums for their shows. It sure wasn’t an easy road. Things were tough in the beginning. They never gave up even though they were hardly making any money for a few years. Green Day had a huge influence on music throughout the 90’s, so here’s their story.

Billie Joe Armstrong was born on February 17, 1972. His father Andy Armstrong played drums in a jazz band and was a truck driver to make money. Five year old Billie Joe began singing in children’s hospitals and old people’s homes to keep them company. He was already developing his musical abilities at such a young age. This marked his entrance into the world of music. Later that year, he recorded his first studio song called “ Looking for Love.” Right before Andy passed away, he bought young Billie a 1956 Fender Stratocaster copy made by Fernandez. This really sparked an interest in the promising musician-to-come. He called this guitar “ Blue,” and he played it till it could be played no more. He really wore this guitar down, and later had copies of it created so he could still use his trademark guitar while playing shows.

Next, came along Mike Dirnt on May 4, 1972. His mother was a heroin addict that had separated from his father, so he was adopted soon after birth. He was born with an enlarged mitral valve in his heart, which would cause him

to have panic attacks and nervousness later in life. One night, his mother brought home a new guy and he was to be Mike's new step-dad. They never hit it off until Mike's mom moved away. But his step-dad passed away when Mike was 17, so he moved back in with his mother. Mike was a tall, skinny, energetic kid and was also a class clown. He met Billie Joe in 1983 at school, and the two hit it off because they had a similar sense of humor. They bonded over their love for The Ramones. Mike had been messing around on the guitar, but then switched over to bass. He and Billie Joe wrote their first song together called " Best Thing in Town." Both came from very poor families, and they had barely any money to afford records or instruments. The only way for them to hear music was to play it. So Mike saved up for a bass.

Tre Cool was born on December 9, 1972. His dad had flown helicopters in Vietnam. Wanting to get away from civilization, his dad moved them near the town Willets up in the mountains where their closest neighbor was a mile away. Turns out this neighbor would be a huge influence on Tre Cool. Larry Livermore, a punk rock fan, magazine writer, and musician would let Tre Cool hangout at his house and listen to his records. One of Larry's friends had moved to Brazil and left his drum set at Larry's house. Tre Cool started to play it occasionally and became interested in drumming to punk rock right away. Eventually, Larry recruited Tre to play drums and a local named Kain Kong to play bass. They formed the punk band called The Lookouts. They released their debut 12"/cassette single, " One Planet One People," on Larry's newly created Lookout! Records. They went on to record a few more albums/eps with Tre on drums.

During April 1986, a venue was discovered at 924 Gilman Street, which was a run-down industrial area. Many local punks helped clean up the venue and begin turning it into a real venue; not some run-down abandoned building. After passing the health, safety, and fire inspections, it held its very first show on December 31, 1986. This venue quickly became the staple for many punk bands. A lot of punk bands that made it big in the 1990's started playing shows at Gilman Street. One of these bands was the precursor to Green Day, Sweet Children.

Sweet Children formed sometime during 1987. It consisted of Billie Joe, Mike, and they recruited a drummer by the name of John Kiffmeyer, aka Al Sobrante. After a few practices, they played their first show in 1987 at the side lounge at Rod's Hickory Pit to about 30 friends and a few patrons wondering what the noise was. The show went over well, and Rod sold enough ribs to invite the band back for a second show. Afterwards, they began playing shows wherever there was a power supply- house parties, garages, and at school. It was at one of these shows that the band first met Larry Livermore. Sweet Children played in front of five people, but they played their hearts out which drew Larry's attention.

On November 26, 1988, Sweet Children had their first gig at Gilman Street. They were so well-received that they played again on January 1, 1989, and a third time on February 11, 1989, supporting Chimpshrine at the band's last show ever. They played their fourth show at Gilman in 3 months on February 24, but this time they were second on the bill, as opposed to opening. In early 1989, Sweet Children went into a local studio and recorded four tracks. Displeased with their current name, they played their last show as Sweet
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Children on April 1, and changed it to Green Day shortly afterwards. The name was inspired by a remark made by the character Ernie on Sesame Street. They released their first single in April 1989 on Lookout! Records. It was entitled "1,000 Hours," and they released it under their new name Green Day. On March 20, 1989, Operation Ivy played their final show and Green Day also played this show as the first with their new name.

Billie Joe had enough of home life by 1989, and he moved out to join Mike living in an abandoned building on West 7th and Peralta, located in West Oakland. He also dropped out of school on February 16, 1990; the day before his 18th birthday. This was a good career move for Billie Joe because it allowed him to focus all his attention to Green Day. After seeing the success of "1,000 Hours," Larry Livermore signed Green Day to Lookout! Records. On December 29, 1989, Green Day entered the studio to begin recording their first full-length and the recording started at 4:30 p.m. By January 2nd, the album was mixed and mastered. The total cost was \$675 for the studio time. To test how well the album would do, Larry recorded another single called "Slappy," and released that sometime in 1990. It was generally well-received and built their fan base even further and solidified the idea of releasing their first full-length.

Early in 1990, Green Day's first full-length was released on vinyl, cassette, and CD. The name was "39/Smooth." It was pulled from the band constantly saying smooth. Also, it was Billie Joe's brother's 39th birthday and he jokingly mentioned that they should add this somewhere in the title. Billie Joe had one goal in 1990: keeping the band going at all costs. He concentrated on booking a 45-date US tour for the band, and he managed to do so. As <https://assignbuster.com/the-work-and-history-of-green-day-music-essay/>

soon as Mike graduated school, they left for the tour. On the inlay of the “Slappy” EP, it read the following: “ To raise spending money for the tour, Mike shucked clams, Billie Joe flipped pizzas, and John drove a diaper truck...” During this tour, Billie Joe met a girl in Minnesota named Adrienne, and he fell for her pretty fast. He booked a few tours afterwards around seeing her. While they were touring in Minneapolis, they went into a local studio and recorded four songs for an EP in a low-budget and quick manner. “ Sweet Children” EP was released on Minneapolis’s Skene! in late 1990. During July 1990, the Lookouts played their final show. They decided to call it quits because they simply lived too far away from each other to schedule practices. But they also left behind “ IV,” a four track single that featured Billie Joe on lead guitar and backing vocals, which was released in January 1991.

Al Sobrante decided to quit Green Day in autumn 1990 in order to go to college full time. Dave EC from Filth and the Wynona Ryders filled in on the drums for a few weeks, but he quit on his own. Finally in November 1990, the two asked Tre Cool to play drums for them. He agreed, and the line-up for Green Day was finally solidified. He fit right in the band with his quirky sense of humor and his energy. They embarked on their first US tour with Tre in 1991. One night after a New Orleans show, they returned to their van only to find that someone had broken in and stolen their money and most of their possessions. Even after that, the band drove through the night to get to their next show in Auburn, Alabama, where fans donated clothes and money to the young band members. On that first tour with Tre, they were supposedly approached by IRS Records, a major record label. But with some self-

restraint on Mike's part, they turned down the offer because they knew that the label would have screwed them over in the end.

They entered the studio for the first time with their new drummer Tre Cool in 1991. Thanks to the small-time success of their previous album, they had a larger budget, \$2, 000. Recordings were split between two short sessions in May and September of 1991 with producer/engineer Andy Ernst helping, a total of four days of recording. That autumn, they bought plane tickets to Europe and flew over, while each band member was still only 19. They funded the trip from their modest royalty checks from their Lookout! releases and any U. S. touring profits to pay for basic necessities such as airfare and van hire. Using equipment borrowed from other bands every single night, they played sixty-four shows over the span of three months. " We snuck copies of our records over by hand to sell," recalls Mike. " To get our own T-shirts made we had to sneak over the photo negative and get a screen made in Germany so we could print them as and when we needed to. Then we had our amp heads, which were hell-heavy to carry. Mine lasted a week and Billie's a total of one day. In Denmark if they like you they throw beer at you, so that was very much. Our instruments were toast." There would be anywhere between 50 and 500 people in places like Germany, Poland, and Spain. If they were lucky, they'd get paid above their guarantee of \$170, but some shows they'd only get paid with some beer or communal chili.

On December 17, 1991, Green Day received the first finished copies of their sophomore album. They decided the show they were playing in Southampton was going to double as a Kerplunk! release party. January 17, 1992 marked <https://assignbuster.com/the-work-and-history-of-green-day-music-essay/>

the official release of their second album. It was released by Lookout! on CD, vinyl, and cassette. For their next tour in support of Kerplunk!, Tre's father bought a former mobile library. He ripped out the interiors and installed bunks, equipment racks, and the odd attempt at home comfort and also, for a while at least, became their new designated driver.

In August 1992, at a show at Gilman, Green Day brought out a couple of new tunes. " Longview" and " Better Not Come Around" (which was the early version of " When I Come Around") received great reactions from the crowd, and the songs sounded like their best and tightest material to date. After touring without management, they decided this needed to change. They contacted Cahnman Management, a company run by two attorneys, Elliot Cahn and Jeff Saltzman, who had previously worked with Primus, the Melvins, and Mudhoney and had impressed Green Day. So they hired them for the job. Immediately, their managers began approaching major record labels, tempting them with a band who sold over 50, 000 albums based on just raw talent alone.

The members of the band were all living together in the basement of a large, ramshackle, student-dominated Victorian house at 2243 Ashby Street, which was just down the block from the pristine entrance to the esteemed University of Berkeley. They were getting many calls from major record labels, who heard that this young cult had now sold a total of 60, 000 copies of their cheaply recorded independent releases and wanted this band to sign to their roster. " Warner Bros., Geffen, Sony and everybody's mother wanted to sign us," said Tre, " but we held off for quite a long time. Why? Because David Geffen's money was paying for us to go to Disneyland. We kind of

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milked them. We wanted to hold out until we got complete artistic control. We wanted to be the bosses and not let somebody else tell us what to do. Of course, the first offer is bull****, the second slightly less, the third still kind of sucks...we thought ' F*** this, it's our lives.' It's like getting married or something."

This would all change when they met Rob Cavallo of Reprise Records, a subsidiary label of Warner Brothers. He was different than all the other higher ups; he actually played guitar and came from a musical background. Also, he had worked with other punk bands such as Jawbreaker and the Muffs, and this had sparked Green Day's interest. The way he got through to them was he brought his guitar and joined them in jamming, then later went out for ice cream with them. It was that day that he convinced them to join the roster. Finally in April 1993, they signed to Warner Bros./Reprise for an initial deal of five albums, with the plan that Cavallo would produce their major label debut. Also, they made sure that Lookout! would still own the rights to their first two albums, the idea being that the indie label's support would earn them money even if Green Day was no longer with them, a move which has paid off very well for Livermore and Co. over the past 10 years. Although Lookout! had just lost their most profitable band, the combined sales of 39/Smooth and Kerplunk! had reached the one million mark by the close of 1995, so they were still making money off Green Day. They played their last two shows at Gilman Street that year, never to look back.

While recording their next album Dookie, they had a much larger budget and more time to lay down tracks in the studio. When the album was completed, they played a bunch of dates over the summer with Bad Religion on their "

Recipe for Hate" tour. Dookie was finally released on January 11, 1994. The lead single from the album was " Longview." It quickly topped the Billboard Modern Rock chart.

Billie Joe was the first in the band to get married. He tied the knot with his long-time lover Adrienne in a quick ceremony in July. The next day, his wife revealed that she had been feeling somewhat different recently, so they stopped to pick up a pregnancy test. A few minutes later, the newlyweds discovered they were about to become parents.

The same year, Green Day's popularity was on the rise. They were asked to replace the opening band the Boredoms in Lollapalooza 1994. Another huge deal for them was when they were asked to play Woodstock '94, as a late addition. This was a day to go down in history. They arrived in upstate New York on August 11, and it had been raining continuously. The ground was completely churned up and all mud. As they began playing songs, the crowd went nuts and began flinging clumps of dirt and mud everywhere. Billie Joe caught the first clod and put it in his mouth. Eventually, he took off his pants as the crowd went even wilder. Fans began climbing on stage to get closer, and soon a riot broke out. The band had to be hauled away in a helicopter to escape the crazed fans.

The summer of 1994 was a busy time for them. Their music video for " Longview" had been nominated by the 1994 MTV Video Music Awards at the Metropolitan City Opera House for " Best Group Video" and " Best Alternative Video." The next night they had a show in Ohio. The whole summer consisted of flying all over the US from show to show, night after night. Their

next big stint was a show in September set up by a Boston radio station that attracted about 100, 000 people. Within minutes of hitting the stage, the crowd had surged forward and knocked over safety barriers and havoc broke out. They were concerned that the entire lighting rig was going to come down, so the promoter pulled the plug. This just made the crowd riot even harder and spill out onto the streets of downtown Boston. The night concluded with 60 arrests and dozens of injuries.

A very respectable thing to do, the band had a policy that door prices were to be kept affordable with a ceiling price of \$20, even though they could charge much more. Sometimes shows even went as low as \$5, and their official t-shirts cost a maximum of \$10. They were still receiving much controversy from the punk community though. People were claiming that they had sold out when they signed to a major record label and that they had compromised their music. Sometime in 1994, someone was so opposed to Green Day signing that they wrote " Billie Joe Must Die" on a wall at 924 Gilman Street.

One night, a fan asked Billie Joe " What's punk?" He then kicked over a garbage can and exclaimed, " That's punk!" So the fan kicked over a garbage can too and replied, " That's punk?" And Billie Joe then replied, " No, that's trendy." Billie Joe still knew what punk was and still had it in him, even though his band was selling millions of albums and quickly becoming the hottest band of the 1990's. They had lived the lifestyle of true punks for many years before they struck it big. One would think that their dedicated fans would be happy for them being successful after sticking it out through

the tough times; going through years of having no money. If anyone deserved to make it huge, it was definitely Green Day.

Since its release, Dookie has sold over 16 million copies worldwide and is the band's top selling album. They have sold over 65 million copies worldwide and are undeniably one of the biggest rock bands there are today. If it wasn't for their music, the whole music scene might be a lot different than it is today. Punk wouldn't have taken the mainstream spotlight in the 1990's, and most punk bands that formed around the same time as Green Day wouldn't have made it as big as they did. Green Day single-handedly changed the direction of music in the 1990's.