

REMIXED TO REMOVE THE SCREAMS

Eva Wiseman

What does it mean to be a fan? I've been thinking about this a lot since I listened to the Beatles' newly released live recordings, remixed to remove the screams. The hollowness of the music stayed with me – it felt as if the songs had been exorcised. At the time, the screaming fans were seen as pests. Worse than pests, stupid, empty pests. “Those who flock round the Beatles,” wrote Paul Johnson in the *New Statesman* in 1964, “who scream themselves into hysteria, whose vacant faces flicker over the TV screen, are the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures”. My mum was one of those fans, and it was a blue sort of thrill when she heard that a gig she'd gone to with her best friend Val, at the ABC Cinema in Ardwick in 1963, featured in the new Beatles film. You could even see Val's face, brief and white. When Val's cancer returned last year, my mum made her a mixtape. It had Beatles songs on it, of course, and when they sat together, they talked about that concert, their fear and that noise. After Val died last March, it seemed beautifully fitting that she'd reappear in the Beatles film, that moment of extreme fandom a happy ghost, screaming.

Because the point of being a fan is to sing along, again and again, and for the meaning to change every time. To lock into something, a song or a film, or even a picture. When I first met Nina at art school, she was already drawing these intimate portraits of her heroes, building miniature sculptures that waited for us in the vast sculpture studio. But this was practically mid-career – she had started, really, when she was a child. On her bedroom wall growing up was a version of Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, the kitschily familiar *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* which populated Phillie's diner with tragic celebrities like James Dean, Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. Nina would imagine them there drinking together and draw her own versions, introducing stars to each other with a sharp pencil for the pleasure of the thing.

It's possible to lose whole afternoons scrolling through the careful fan art people have uploaded to the internet, a thousand Jennifer Anistons, a hundred Luke Perrys. They float there, one eye looking at you, the other looking through you, like waxworks in hot weather. I love that Nina doesn't shrug off the comparison – in fact, she feels comfortable aligning herself with these bedroom artists, as she sees herself as a fan, foremost. A fan who obsesses over the stars she's loved forever, but recasts them in scenes that suggest darkness and sometimes danger. There they lie, sprawled like a tabloid image of Liverpool during Freshers' Week.

Partly it's because Nina shows her workings, the sketch lines and careful collaging of moments, that we look at her work and see not just glamour and lust but a kind of emptiness, a kind of anxiety to the heroines she draws. Which, quite aside from the technical skill, is one of the reasons why her epic pieces are not just fan art. They're uncomfortable to look at, they have corners that catch on you, they point to the problem with fandom and fame and success. They hint at the cycles of abuse and awfulness that grind away underneath the glamour, reminding us that the violence we see in her work continues in Hollywood today. The star industry is one that offers redemption

narratives to all its handsome men. This year, an Oscar was awarded to Casey Affleck, fresh from settling a series of sexual harassment lawsuits. 2017's Oscars also featured Mel Gibson (accused of assaulting his ex-girlfriend and making anti-Semitic remarks) and in 2014 Woody Allen (accused by Mia Farrow's daughter of assaulting her as a child) was given a lifetime achievement award at the Golden Globes. In 2003, Roman Polanski won the Oscar for directing *The Pianist*, 25 years after pleading guilty to unlawful sexual intercourse with a 13-year-old girl. A beaming Harrison Ford accepted the award on his behalf. Nina says she "draws with an eraser"; so does Hollywood.

"You want to stop that movement from the popcorn to the mouth. Get people to stop chewing." Nina sent me a quote from Marlon Brando. "The truth will do that." Her newest work is an installation, where we emerge through a tunnel into a wet room, where Brando prepares for the scene where he'll shout 'Stella' in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. We stop then, alone with him showering, and as well as awe and admiration, inevitably many of us will feel uneasy. A little hangnail of discomfort, as we balance our glorious memories of his work with recent revelations about how it was made. Maria Schneider explained that the scene in 'Last Tango in Paris' where Brando uses butter as lube wasn't in the original script. "Marlon said to me: 'Maria, don't worry, it's just a movie,' but during the scene, even though what Marlon was doing wasn't real, I was crying real tears," she said. "I felt humiliated and to be honest, I felt a little raped, both by Marlon and by Bertolucci. After the scene, Marlon didn't console me or apologize. Thankfully, there was just one take." And there we'll stand, his adoring fans, holding all the feelings that come with an image of Brando in our hand like pebbles.

Nina went to Graceland with her dad at 17, and she tells the story of a man dressed casually as Vegas-era Elvis, gazing longingly at one of the King's costumes while his wife shook her head, saying, "I will NOT make you another cape." She went to Memphis as a fan, and to watch fans, and it seems as though her work is richer for her understanding of the horrors of fandom, as well as its pure collectable joy. My mum remembers the concert captured in that Beatles film, one of the last before the band stopped touring, in part because the four of them couldn't deal with the screaming. She told me about how it felt to scream back then, in passion and protest, and about the way it tied her to Val forever. Watching footage of girls screaming at their idols, they're at once individuals, each feeling a noisy passion, and part of something bigger that stretches across time and culture, shifting according to the season.

Within fandom we celebrate the bad as well as the good – femininity, desire, violence, grief. That's what it means to be a fan. And here in Nina's work is a place to explore it.

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