

# ROCK'S 50 BIGGEST MONEYMAKERS

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# Rolling Stone

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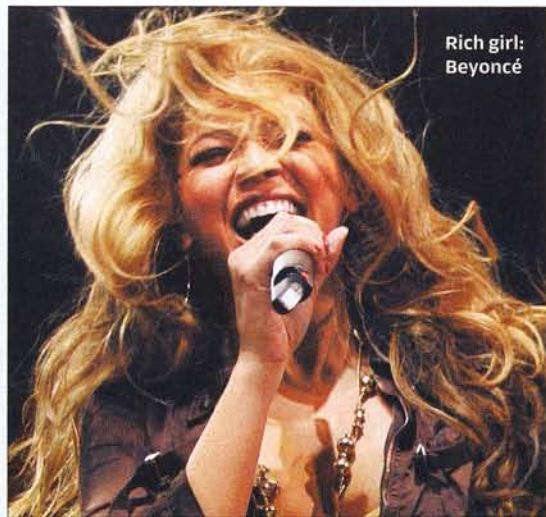
# GREEN DAY

How the Brats Grew Up, Bashed Bush and Conquered the World

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"All the News That Fits"



Rich girl:  
Beyoncé

## Money Honey

Fortunate ones: Our annual list of music's top fifty earners, from Prince to Beyoncé to... Phil Collins?

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**Cover** Photographed by James Dimmock

Green Day (Tré Cool, Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt, from left), Nottingham, England, January 2005. Styling by Grace Woodward at ESP. Grooming by Sinden at Streeters. Armstrong's tie and shirt by Camden Lock. Pants by Dogpile. Cool's shirt by Hugo Boss. Tie by Camden Lock. Pants by Lincoln Mayne. Dirnt's shirt and pants by Obedient Sons.

In 1967, the King of Late Night showed the Godfather of Soul a few of his moves.




## Johnny Be Good

For thirty years, Johnny Carson was master of his late-night TV domain. On camera, with an audience of tens of millions, he was comfortable and in control. But away from the spotlight, he led a private, guarded existence. In 1979, at the height of his powers, he made an exception and opened up to **ROLLING STONE** in what turned out to be the most in-depth interview of his career. Following his recent death, we dug into the archives for Johnny's insights on fame, comedy and rock.

GET THE  
WHOLE  
STORY  
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How did the formerly booger-obsessed punks grow up to make a rock opera that takes on George Bush? They hit the sauce and followed the road of excess all the way to the top of the charts

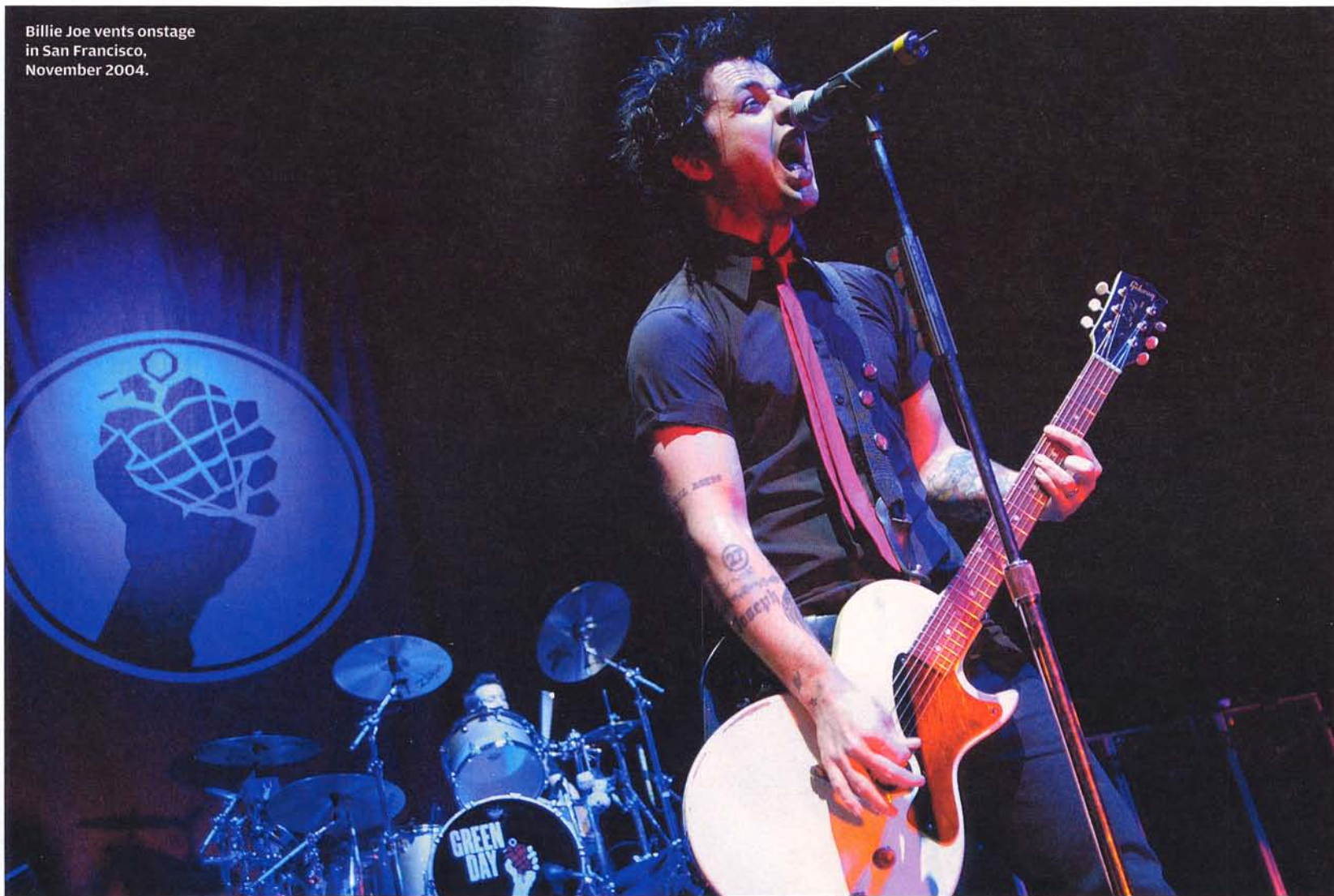
# Green Day

and the  
Palace of  
Wisdom

By **Matt  
Hendrickson**  
Photograph  
by James  
Dimmock

Triumph of the green:  
Tré Cool, Mike Dirnt  
and Billie Joe  
Armstrong (from left)

Billie Joe vents onstage  
in San Francisco,  
November 2004.



L

ET EVERY REDNECK IN AMERICA HEAR YOU," YELLS GREEN DAY guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong, and 5,000 British fans respond with a chant of "idiot America!" It is January, and Green Day are playing London's Brixton Academy, two weeks into a European tour that sold 175,000 tickets in less than an hour. In April, the band begins a one-month U.S. arena tour behind *American Idiot*, the album that debuted at Number One in September and has barely been out of the Top Ten since. The album that took on George Bush and the war in Iraq ("We did everything we could to piss people off," says Armstrong, who performed the title track in a Bush mask in the weeks leading up to the presidential election). The album that earned the band seven Grammy nominations, including Album of the Year (Winning that one, says bassist Mike Dirnt, "would restore my faith in rock & roll," to which Armstrong adds, "I feel like we deserve it"). The album that made Green Day superstars again.

ONSTAGE AT BRIXTON, ARMSTRONG is like a windup doll gone crazy, constantly moving. Drummer Tré Cool keeps getting up to circle his drum kit while banging on his cymbals. About the only person in the place who's stationary is Dirnt, though even from the back of the crowd you can see the veins pop out of his neck. "This song is a big fuck-you to the American government," Armstrong says before the band plays "Holiday." "This song is not anti-American, it's anti-war." The giant video screens behind him light up with images of helicopters dropping bombs.

Almost an hour later, Green Day encore with an utterly sincere cover of Queen's "We Are the Champions." The entire crowd sings along. It feels like Green Day are not just celebrating their return to the top of the charts; they're leading a rock & roll resistance movement.



Young, blond and bad in 1994: Cool, Armstrong and Dirnt (from left)

mediately attack them. He was blocked, and he realized "to be in the greatest band in the world, we have to work on the small stuff."

So in 2003, when it came time to make a new record, they decided to add one thing to their daily band-practice schedule: mandated weekly conversation time. It was Armstrong's idea, and it worked. "We bared our souls to one another," says Dirnt. "Admitting that we cared for each other was a big thing," says Cool. "We didn't hold anything back." They don't want to talk about the grievances they aired, just the results. "Before, Billie would write a song, get stuck and then say, 'Fuck it,'" says Cool. "The imaginary Mike and Tré in his head would say, 'That song sucks. Don't waste your time on it.' He stopped doing that and became totally fearless around me and Mike."

For Armstrong, that meant leaving be-

WHEN GREEN DAY FIRST HIT IT BIG with *Dookie* in 1994, they were three kids from a grimy punk-rock collective in Berkeley, California. They sang about teen boredom, masturbation and being couch potatoes. *Dookie* sold 10 million copies but drew the scorn of the punks they grew up with. By twenty-three, they were all millionaires and all married. They kept making records but stopped talking to one another. Before long, between them they had five kids and three divorces.

In 2001, they put out a greatest-hits album and went on the road. And the story could have ended there. "Breaking up was an option," says Dirnt. "We were arguing a lot and we were miserable. We needed to shift directions."

So they spent a year working out their differences and learning to make a new kind of music. Armstrong confessed to Dirnt and Cool that he had a secret, not very punk ambition: to write "the 'Bohemian Rhapsody' of the future." Soon they were working out the nine-minute suites that form the heart of

*American Idiot*, "Jesus of Suburbia" and "Homecoming." Word leaked out that they were making a rock opera. "I looked on the message board," says Armstrong, "and some kids thought we were crazy. It's like, 'Fuck it, take the message board down.' We decided we were going to be the biggest, best band in the world or fall flat on our faces."

It's the day after the Brixton show. Armstrong has sunk down into a lime-green chair at his London hotel. He's the only member of Green Day who still looks younger than his age (all three celebrate their thirty-third birthdays this year), though today he's tired from a tour schedule so relentless he's sworn off alcohol for the month. Armstrong remains a drinker but no longer gets stoned—a major change in a band that named itself after a song they'd written about spending the

day smoking pot, though not a surprising one for a guy with two young sons: Joey, 10, and Jakob, 6. He's relaxed and talks slowly, with a weary confidence.

According to Armstrong, Green Day spent the three years following 2000's *Warning* "not talking about things, and not wanting to rock the boat." What had started as three seventeen-year-olds getting high and bashing out punk tunes had become a business, and over time a declining business. Resentment built, none of it articulated. Armstrong is the group's natural leader, a quiet take-charge guy, but he mentions in passing that he can see how Dirnt and Cool began to view him as the band's Nazi. He, in turn, became so mired in their resentment that he was afraid to show his bandmates new songs, because they'd im-

hind the bratty attitude of early Green Day songs such as "Basket Case" and "Geek Stink Breath." "I felt like I was too old to be angry anymore," he says. "I didn't want to come across as the angry older guy. It's sexy to be an angry young man, but to be a bitter old bastard is another thing altogether."

In an effort to find a new groove, they recorded polka songs, filthy versions of Christmas tunes, salsa numbers. The goofs opened up the way to real songs, and after four and a half months at their studio in Oakland, California, they had twenty finished tracks. Then one day they came in to find the masters were stolen. "We were really pissed," says Armstrong. "But it ended up being good because we were readying ourselves to go where we hadn't gone before."

But first Armstrong took off for New

## It's sexy to be an angry young man, not a bitter old bastard.

### THE ROLLING STONE PLAYLIST

# Green Day in Forty-three Minutes

Forget the greatest-hits collection. Here's a mix of chart toppers and obscure tracks that show Green Day at their best

- 1. Green Day** *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours* (3:29): The band's signature pop-punk song about a twenty-four-hour marijuana binge, on their 1990 full-length debut.
- 2. I Was There** *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours* (3:36): Green Day's own Pete Best (former drummer John Kiffmeyer) penned this mournful look back on his time in the

- band. And this is *before* they got rich.
- 3. 2000** *Light Years Away Kerplunk* (2:24): A Buzzcocks-inspired tribute to distant love.
- 4. Longview** *Dookie* (3:59): Tale of chronic masturbation wins a mass audience.
- 5. When I Come Around** *Dookie* (2:58): Green Day's most infectious single, period.
- 6. J.A.R. (Jason Andrew Relva)** *Angus*

- (2:52): Forgotten gem from the soundtrack to a forgotten 1995 flick.
- 7. Walking Contradiction** *Insomniac* (2:31): A furious anthem about selling out.
- 8. Hitchin' a Ride** *Nimrod* (2:51): A concert fave, about a hitchhiking alcoholic.
- 9. The Grouch** *Nimrod* (2:12): Billie Joe turns twenty-five and freaks out: "Oh, my

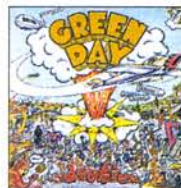
- God, I'm turning out like my dad!"
- 10. Macy's Day Parade** *Warning* (3:34): Blows away "Good Riddance" as best ballad.
- 11. Blood, Sex and Booze** *Warning* (3:33): S&M ode to a dominatrix named Kill. Yikes.
- 12. Jesus of Suburbia** *American Idiot* (9:08): A flawless nine-minute, five-part punk-rock suite? Top that, Good Charlotte.



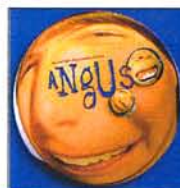
1,039, 1990



Kerplunk, 1992



Dookie, 1994



Angus, 1995



Insomniac, 1995



Nimrod, 1997



Warning, 2000



American Idiot, 2004

York to get more wasted than he'd been in a long while. He left his wife and two young sons for a month and "drank a lot of red wine, and vodka tonics," he says. "I was searching for something. I'm not sure it was the most successful trip."

"He was really questioning what he was doing," says Adrienne Armstrong, his wife of ten years. "It was scary, because where he had to go to get this record wasn't a place I'm sure I wanted him to be." And it wasn't until Armstrong came home and the hangover haze began to clear that he found his subject, while watching TV footage of U.S. troops invading Iraq: politics.

**A**RMSTRONG GREW UP IN THE EAST Bay, northeast of San Francisco, and remembers singing in front of audiences when he was as young as five. "I learned show tunes as a kid," he says. "My dad was a jazz drummer, and I used to go to



With John Kerry at the Letterman show, September 2004

takes over: 'It's not your business who I vote for.' It stops people from thinking so much. They develop a hard-nosed opinion, and then suddenly they stop taking in information. I don't have a million things against conservatives. Johnny Ramone was a very nice guy but a total fucking Republican. I still liked the guy. That's where it gets screwed up. If someone believes one thing, it turns into 'us against them.' This album is about feelings. I didn't want to make a Rage Against the Machine record. I wanted to make an album of heartfelt songs."

**B**ACKSTAGE, PRIOR TO A GIG AT THE Manchester Evening News Arena, Green Day have gotten into uniform: matching black shirts and red ties. Tré Cool holes up with a drum set in a practice room with sea-green walls and a red vinyl floor. He spends an hour jamming with the band's backing musicians: two horn players and a guitarist. He often spends the bus rides after shows jamming like this. "Fuck video games," he says gleefully. "We've got jazz improv!"

Billie Joe Armstrong warms up by running in the halls listening to his iPod. When he runs, he kicks his ankles up to his butt. Mike Dirnt has a light meal in the catering area — he's getting over a cold — and talks about his love of stand-up comedy. Last year, he got onstage at the Comedy Store in Los Angeles. "I killed for three minutes out of four," he says.

The band takes the stage to the theme song from 2001. Tonight's show is the biggest of the European tour — 15,000 people screaming approval for an hour and a half. "This is the best fucking tour we've ever done," Armstrong announces from the stage. The centerpiece of the show comes when Armstrong brings three audience members onstage, gives them instruments and leads them through a cover of "Knowledge," a three-chord punk classic by Operation Ivy, one of the Gilman Street bands Green Day came up with. The crash-and-bash simplicity is a beautiful counterpoint to the musical complexity of the *American Idiot* material — it shows where Green Day started and how far they've come.

"There's a sense of underdog and politics, but the party is a lot of fun, too," an elated Armstrong says of the Operation Ivy cover backstage after the show. "To connect with the kids like that is so important. That barrier gets chopped off." Armstrong is drenched in sweat. He sits next to Adrienne on a black leather couch. When she makes a comment about getting back to the hotel and "doing nothing tonight," he looks at her adoringly.

Ten years of uneasy living, career crises and emotional breakdowns have brought Green Day to this point. "For the first time in our career, it's all about the music," Armstrong says. "There's no bullshit, no reality shit, no nostalgic trip. That's what makes the last ten years more worth it. Plus the fact that we all dress pretty sharp." **CE**

MATT HENDRICKSON wrote the cover story on *Rage Against the Machine* in RS 768.

## 'American Idiot' can be anti-Bush, but it's also a human story.

veterans' hospitals and sing." He started piano lessons when he was eight. "I wanted to play guitar, but they said my hands were too small." When he was ten, his father died of cancer (a loss he addresses for the first time on *American Idiot*'s "Wake Me Up When September Ends"), leaving Armstrong and his five siblings to be raised by their harried waitress mother and, when she remarried two years later, a stepfather they detested.

At fourteen, he formed his first band, Sweet Children, with Dirnt, his best friend since he was ten. Born to a heroin-addicted mother who gave him up for adoption, Dirnt is the only member of the band to graduate from high school. His adoptive parents divorced when he was seven years old, leaving him torn between his prosperous father, a white computer programmer, and his struggling mother, a Native American who didn't hide her racial animosity. "I grew up with my mom hating the white man and loving me," he has said.

Dirnt left home at fifteen, and he and Armstrong started hanging at Berkeley's Gilman Street Project, a graffiti-splashed, fire-code-skirting club that was home to a burgeoning teen punk scene. Sweet Children turned into Green Day, and after their first tour they took on a new drummer: Gilman Street veteran Tré Cool.

Cool was born Frank Edwin Wright III, the son of a Vietnam veteran who started a trucking company. He grew up in Willits, California — a town in the Mendocino mountains so rural that his nearest neighbor was a mile away — and began playing

drums with his first band, the Lookouts, when he was just twelve years old (the band's singer, Lawrence Livermore, later founded Green Day's first label, Lookout! Records).

After the success of *Dookie*, the scene they'd found a home in condemned them as pop-punk traitors. "The backlash, our hometown feeling like we sold out, we were playing into that," says Armstrong. "Ninety-nine percent of it was good, and we were focusing on the one percent that wasn't. That's the one thing I wish we could have changed. Who gives a shit?" Alienated from the makeshift family of Gilman Street, they started families of their own. By twenty-five, they were all married with children.

Armstrong's marriage has survived. During the European tour, his sons were back home with their grandmother, but his wife was never far from his side. "I love that she still watches our shows," he says. "The thing that's great is that the music still gets under her skin in the same way that it affects me."

For Cool and Dirnt, things have been different. Cool has endured two divorces and, more recently, a failed romance with Donnas drummer Torry Castellano. He has two children, one from each of his former wives and is, he says, "still trying to work it all out." *American Idiot* helped. "There were a lot of waterworks making this record; I went through the worst time of my life," he says.

Dirnt, too, went through a painful separation during the *Idiot* sessions. "My ex-wife told me she was leaving me the day we finished the album," he says. Dirnt has moved on and currently has a new girlfriend. He talks about lavishing attention on his eight-year-old daughter but calls the divorce "a blessing but just an emotional drain. It was horrible and great.

When we mastered the record, I cried through the entire thing."

**I**N MAY 2003, GREEN DAY WENT BACK TO work in their Oakland studio. They left behind the twenty songs they'd lost and started from scratch with a demo for a new song Armstrong had come up with on long walks around his neighborhood, "American Idiot": "Don't want to be an American idiot/One nation controlled by the media/Information age of hysteria." Soon more songs came and a story emerged: a kid — the Jesus of Suburbia — making his way through the world of punk rock with a drunken prophet named St. Jimmy as his guide. There's drugs and music and a girl, Whatsername, whom Armstrong calls "every girl I've been involved with."

And there's something else: an indictment of the Bush administration and of the reality-TV-obsessed media. "We were in the studio and watching the journalists embedded with the troops, and it was the worst version of reality television," Armstrong says. "Switch the channel, and it's Nick and Jessica. Switch, and it's *Fear Factor*. Switch, and people are having surgery to look like Brad Pitt. We're surrounded by all of that bullshit, and the characters Jesus of Suburbia and St. Jimmy are as well. It's a sign of the times."

The sound of *American Idiot* careens from old-school punk to Motown soul and Who-style anthems. Armstrong credits a wide variety of inspirations: "I used everything I knew about music. Show tunes, musicals like *Grease* and the struggle between right and wrong, *The Joshua Tree* — I tried to soak in everything and make it Green Day.

"The atmosphere can be anti-Bush, and I definitely had that in mind, but when you get down to it, it's a human story," he continues. "In the U.S., that puritanical feeling

### Idiots Rule

Check out the California punks' videos for "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" and "American Idiot" at [rollingstone.com/greenday](http://rollingstone.com/greenday)