BEING BILL MURRAY | RS INTERVIEW STEPHEN KING

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U2
TAKE ON THE WORLD

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JEFFREY TAMBOR ON 'TRANSPARENT'

The former *Arrested Development* funnyman talks about his most challenging role yet, as an aging parent who comes out as transgender in Amazon's *Transparent*.

PEE-WEE'S RETURN TO THE 'PLAYHOUSE'

With the complete five-season run of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* coming to Blu-ray, we sat down with Paul Reubens to look back on the show – and ahead to a possible new movie.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY: WHY IT'S AT A TIPPING POINT

A slew of recent court decisions has brought same-sex marriage to 30 states, and most Republicans have stayed quiet. Is the debate over?

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TRYING TO THROW THEIR ARMS AROUND THE WORLD

They're the biggest band left on Earth, but for U2, that's not nearly enough. Inside their impossible quest

BY BRIAN HIATT

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SELIGER

Larry Mullen Jr., Bono, the Edge and Adam Clayton (from left) in Dublin in September

"THIS IS THE BIG SOUND," SAYS THE EDGE.

He rattles a basement rehearsal space with three monster chords from a vintage Epiphone Casino guitar, dunked in distortion so ferocious that his black baseball cap seems in danger of flying off. Bono is right beside him, listening hard, squinting at the fretwork through pale-blue aviator shades. The singer is wearing a hat of his own, a jaunty, black-banded Panama-style number that makes it look like he's in disguise, on vacation, or both.

No matter how huge a noise they make, U2 are, for once, playing in a little room. They've hauled an unreasonable amount of equipment and a half-dozen-plus crew members into a purple-carpeted, wood-walled studio at a TV station on the French Riviera, where Bono is leading them through rehearsals for radio and talk-show performances.

On this October evening, Larry Mullen Jr. is at his drum kit, in head-to-toe black, running through a clickety-clacking song intro with uninterrupted intensity. Adam Clayton, in a sparkly purple shirt, bass guitar hanging at his waist, is flicking at his iPhone. He's probably checking his e-mail rather than, say, looking for his free U2 album (or trying to delete it).

They're working up a live arrangement of their current single "The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)." The Edge's jagged "big sound" isn't quite working, even though it's exactly what he used on the version from their new album, *Songs of Innocence*. "Songs are never finished," Bono says. Like almost all of their music, "Miracle" crawled out from a relentless process of forced, hot-house evolution – in this case, over four years, with three different producers. It started as a drum-loop-and-acoustic-guitar-based tune called "Drummer Boy," from 2010 sessions with the producer Danger Mouse. Then it turned into a rock-ier larval-stage thing called "Siren" (one line compared the Ramones' music to a siren song) with heavy input from OneRepublic frontman Ryan Tedder and Adele producer Paul Epworth, before developing its definitive melody and lyric over two months of sessions with Epworth. But even now, it hasn't quite settled into a final shape.

"You've got a digital-sounding distortion," Bono tells the Edge. "It's not a sound that can *lift*. In the pre-chorus, is there a mezzanine level? You got a little brown sauce, so we need it more funky, more like 'Mysterious Ways.' Try it with the 'Mysterious' sound; see if it works." The Edge, stoic Spock to Bono's voluble Kirk, duly dials up that *Achtung Baby* track's wah-wah soup.

"All right, once more," Bono says, and "Miracle" shape-shifts once again, into something slinkier and more brash than the album version: Mullen overdelivers on Bono's request for "more cymbals, more dynamics"; Clayton nails what Bono describes as "a bass part so great you could build a house on it," with an occasional glance at a chord chart; Bono emotes at full concert volume into a hand-held mic, shaking his hips a bit, sounding implausibly youthful. "That was some numskull fuckin' business," says Bono. "Really good!"

As the Edge fiddles with his gear, Bono wanders over to offer some director's commentary. "We just need another color," he says. "Because we're using a swing beat. Making this album, we went back and listened to all the music that had brought us into ourselves, then we said, *Now let's misremember it*. The Ramones never used a swing beat in their lives – but the New York Dolls, they were glam: They did. People say, 'That song doesn't sound like the Ramones!' But that would not be a compliment, to pastiche them – we're trying to do something more interesting."

The Edge will stay here on his own for hours tonight, working out a new secondary sound and modified guitar part for the song, in hopes of "not going numskull all the way through." "The 'Mysterious Ways' thing was the wrong idea," he'll say over breakfast the next morning, "but it led to the right idea."

U2 aren't touring until next year, but the concerts somehow seem to exist, fully formed, in the mind of Bono. The band tries one of the new album's most exciting tracks, "Volcano," which kicks off with a bass hook composed by the Edge. ("He's one of these guys that stays up all night thinking about ways of making you look good," says Clayton.) Right before they reach the breakdown – a shout of "You were alone/Now you're not alone" evoking the moment 16-year-old Paul Hewson found his band – Bono dashes over and yells in my ear: "That's the key moment of the show," he says. It's a crowd-pleasing climax that begs for dramatic arena treatment: flashing lights, a mass singalong. "But it's going to be hard on TV." To make up for the lack of staging, they rework the moment, turning it into a stop-start duel between Bono's voice, Edge's power chords and some impressively reckless thrashing from Mullen.

"We don't want to be in a niche. That sounds like a place where you retire and grow vegetables."

In a break room, Bono discusses the weekend he spent with his family at home in Dublin, where he watched one of his young son's rugby games, played some guitar with the other, hosted a family viewing of *Edge of Tomorrow* ("Stupid name, but not a stupid idea – Emily Blunt was brilliant in it, and Tom Cruise is a very fine actor, you forget. He did all the Tom Cruise things; he did all the running"), listened to a bunch of old Pixies albums ("It still sounds like fresh paint 20 years later"), and celebrated his friend Gavin Friday's 55th birthday ("I gave him a Mick Rock picture of David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed – he kind of choked up").

He's excited about playing the new songs for audiences, less so about practicing them. "Rehearsing is boring," Bono says, biting into an apple. "I'm bored with the sound of my own voice. And that shouldn't be! Something must be

Senior writer Brian Hiatt *profiled U2 in 2009.*

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PRODUCED BY RUTH LEVY

gravely wrong with a singer who feels like that."

He just landed on the Riviera, and on the way to the studio, he happened to catch "The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)" on the Parisian pop-radio station NRJ. Four decades into his career, it's an experience he still relishes. "It's the greatest feeling you could experience in your life," he says. "It sounded so great! Then the signal started going. We entered a tunnel. It was like, 'Move the tunnel!'"

"We were ready to drive straight into the ocean to keep hearing it," adds his personal assistant, a cheerful young woman named Eabha.

"NRJ is like Radio 1," says Bono, referring to the BBC's pop station. "Everything is at a hyperventilating kind of pace: 'We're having *zee* most exciting time in *zee* world!' I just love them, because they'll risk format juxtapositions. This is the dream, to be where you're not expected. It's just the biggest thrill ever. Once you're in your ghetto, once you're in your niche – a niche sounds like some sort of place in a country where you retire and grow vegetables. We don't want to be in a niche!"

TWO WEEKS EARLIER, BONO IS sitting in the back seat of his Maserati sedan, headed to a favorite Dublin pub for a pint or three of Guinness. He's wearing a hesher's dream of a custom-made jacket, half-denim and half-leather, and what looks like a military-grade platinum version of his shades. He's hatless, revealing an almost Morrissey-like quiff – after dyeing his hair black for years, he's returned it to a reddish brown.

SONGS ARE NEVER DONE

The Edge in 2010, the year the band started work on *Innocence* with Danger Mouse.

It's been only a few days since U2 pulled off the most audacious stunt of a four-decade career that's never been short on audacity, teaming with Apple to make *Songs of Innocence* available for free to every iTunes user. The gift sparked an instant, noisy, sometimes kinda-hysterical backlash: *The Washington Post* called the album "dystopian junk mail"; *The New Yorker* railed against a "lack of consent"; tech writers used terms like "spam" and "malware" and "dad rock"; a shocking number of kids on Twitter revealed themselves to be unaware of U2's existence altogether. The narrative seemed to shift by mid-October, when Apple revealed that more than 80 million people listened to at least some of the album, but then Bono seemed to flat-out call the whole deal a mistake in a Facebook chat with fans. "Oops," he said. "I'm sorry about that."

"I've said this many times," Bono says, "but, you know, in America, you look up at the mansion on the hill and you say, 'One day, if I work really hard, I might get to live there.' In Ireland, particularly in Dublin, you look at the mansion and you say, 'One day, I'm going to get that bastard.' That's a great preparation for life on the Internet."

We're approaching one of Dublin's most-trafficked thoroughfares, Grafton Street, where Bono recalls driving around in an orange VW Beetle, the Edge's mom at the wheel – "she was our first roadie" – with rolls of wallpaper advertising U2 that they'd paste over all the other posters, including other bands'. "Our original name was the Hype, I'll have you know. We kind of thought that was part of what punk rock was: getting in people's faces. So we shouldn't be surprised when they want to get back in ours.

"I take some pride in being divisive," he says, leaning back in his seat, "what Lee 'Scratch' Perry would call 'a great upsetter.' All my heroes were like that. But I do appreciate that I might have an extra-special annoying gene, which really helps me in this pursuit. At my most nervous, I will smirk, and you do want to wipe that smirk off the other fellow's face sometimes. It's very easy to look at U2 and go, 'There's no junkies in the band as far as we can tell, no one is dead or dying, and they seem to like each other and are in love with their wives. I've had it! Get them out of my face!'

"The thing I hold onto most tightly during a shitstorm like we had last week," he continues, "apart from an umbrella, is the direct line of conversation we have with our audience, who I think have a sense

of who we are through this very intimate music we've been making over the years."

We're arriving at the pub, Grogans, where local artists' paintings cover every available spot on the walls. "Low-profile vibes," Bono tells his security guy, as we take a corner table that's been magically held for us. We're quickly joined by a friendly woman in a purple sweater, Lucy Matthew, who's a key figure in Bono's nonmusical life: She helped set up his ONE and (RED) campaigns and aids him in his activism. "Lucy is the reason some people think I'm clever," says Bono. "Moving through different worlds, she's the reason. She doesn't think there's anything unusual about the fact that I'm interested in lots of stuff – which I do know puzzles people, the multiple-personality disorders.

"It's all the zeitgeist, and you *chase* the zeitgeist. Sometimes it's in technology, sometimes it's in culture, in music, in fashion, in politics, in science. The zeitgeist is the thing. And I don't know an artist that isn't interested in it – but it isn't just happening in culture." Picking up speed, Bono delivers the following impressive mouthful in all of 20 seconds: "Painters met in Paris in the start of the 20th century, and it wasn't just painting. Einstein delivers his theory of relativity, 1905. You have the Bolshevik Revolution because of those incendiary tracts written by Karl Marx. You have the first Cubist exhibition in Paris. And they're all related, because, what is the theory of relativity? An object changes shape at the speed of light. So now a face can look like that, because a face is no longer what we see."

He returns, without transition, to his own life. "I need to do things in order to learn them," he says. "Entering politics and trying to understand that, that's made a lot of enemies. The lovers and the haters – they've swelled their ranks over the years. I've made my life difficult for my bandmates, I really have. But my wanderlust, if you want to call it that, is just at the very heart of who I am. And even commerce, to understand commerce – I think that's very important. If you told me 20 years ago that commerce took more people out of poverty than aid and development, I'd have scoffed. So if I see technology is transforming music, I have to learn it, so I dive into it. I know it can confuse people, and they think that I've lost interest in being an artist. But that is what I think an artist is."

One thing Bono says he didn't quite understand: the fact that *Songs of Innocence* would automatically download itself onto some people's phones. "It's like we put a bottle of milk in people's fridge that they weren't asking for," he says. "It is a gross invasion!" He smiles. "But it was kind of an accident. The milk was supposed to be in the cloud. It was supposed to be on the front doorstep."

Some pints arrive, and Bono cackles when I show him a viral joke GIF that displays a supposed new iPhone OS, with his face on every icon. He points out, with some pride, that his silhouette has actually been on the iPhone's Music app (under the "Artists" icon) for years. "I've hacked into you before you even knew," he says. "I've been looking at you every time you pressed 'Music.' Like, every time you're pressing on my head. How do you think that feels? It's a bruising encounter for me."

Mullen, the band's other alpha male, is least bruised by the backlash: "I couldn't give a rat's ass," he says. "I really couldn't." He's all hard edges, Mullen, from his haircut to his jutting cheekbones to his best-in-band physique. He bristles at his reputation as the band's designated contrarian, and he may be its most essential protector, torpedoing ideas like making Bono and the Edge's ill-fated *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* soundtrack a U2 album. "It's all about instinct," says Mullen. "There are lines I won't cross, but I think the most dangerous thing is not to have the debate. With the Apple thing, I had questions about it, but it was kind of a no-brainer: They want to buy your album, and they want to give it to people for free."

"It was a gross invasion!" says Bono of the album launch. "But it was kind of an accident."

Clayton, the only member of U2 whose personality could be plausibly described as "laid-back," has the most idiosyncratic take. "These digital, online companies cross borders," he says, delicately sampling an antipasto platter at a Dublin restaurant where a signed *October*-era picture of his band hangs on the wall, featuring a decades-younger Clayton with an awesomely buoyant New Wave hairdo. "They have infinitely more power than any traditional corporation. From our point of view, we got our record out to as many people as possible. What I'm saying is, look, that power is there. And blaming us for pointing it out seems to be a case of shooting the messenger, really."

Bono dreamed up the Apple scheme with U2's new manager, Guy Oseary, who took over after longtime manager Paul McGuinness stepped down in 2013. "We'd been talking: How do you use this technology?" Bono says. "Because it's using us. So there must be a way to get these songs out to people who may not even know we're there. You know, people have gone to college and left without a U2 album. We had to start again. At the very core of who we are is that yearning for new ears, new eyes, new hearts."

Bono then brought the plan to Apple CEO Tim Cook: They had a preexisting relationship, in part because Apple has raised around $76 million for (RED). (Though new Apple employee and longtime associate Jimmy Iovine closely followed the making of this album, he insists he had no connection to the release plan.) The Apple/U2 relationship had been rudely interrupted when U2 went to BlackBerry for sponsorship of their 360° Tour in 2009. They did so, Bono says, in the wake of an argument (the words "go fuck yourself" were used) with the late Steve Jobs, who was a close friend. "I had a tantrum, like a child, and went to the competition," Bono says with a shrug. To Jobs' great credit, he adds, the company kept up its partnership with (RED), and the two men reconciled well before his passing.

It's never been easy to produce a U2 record. Iovine quit working as a producer altogether after the brutal experience of *Rattle and Hum* in 1988. "They exhaust you," says Iovine. "You're wrestling four guys coming in rotation and then all together at the same time. I mean, it's unbelievable how they work. It made me go start Interscope. I'm not kidding! I love them, but I would never go into a recording studio with them ever again whatsoever!"

This time around was no different. "Making a U2 record, it's like trying to get worms back in the can," says Epworth. "You think you've wrestled them in, and then suddenly they've all popped out again. Their process is very much 'Find as many good ideas as you can and make the best ones fight it out.'"

It didn't help that the band was disappointed in the performance of its last album, 2009's *No Line on the Horizon*, which diluted underrated U2 classics ("Moment of Surrender," "Breathe" and the title track among them) with what Clayton and Mullen, at least, now see as weaker choices: the lyrically clever but musically inert "Stand Up Comedy," the energetic but cluttered "Get on Your Boots."

"'Boots' was an absolutely catastrophic choice for a single," says Mullen, still seething about it, five years later. "It was madness, but the decision was made, and that was the beginning of the end. We never recovered from it." The accompanying 360° Tour was the highest-grossing tour ever, by anyone, but as it

went on, U2 kept playing fewer and fewer *Horizon* tracks. "It was a little bit of a defeat," says Mullen.

After setting aside some early experiments on a "club" record with Lady Gaga collaborator RedOne and other pop-leaning producers ("The work we did with RedOne was very, very exciting, but I'm not sure it was the essence of what U2 is good at," says Clayton), U2 met up with Brian "Danger Mouse" Burton in 2010. "It was a really inspiring time, those first sessions with Danger Mouse," says the Edge, "that moment where you try to find out if you can work together. We started a couple of tunes that ended up on the album in the first few days." He laughs. "Of course, they went on a bit of a journey."

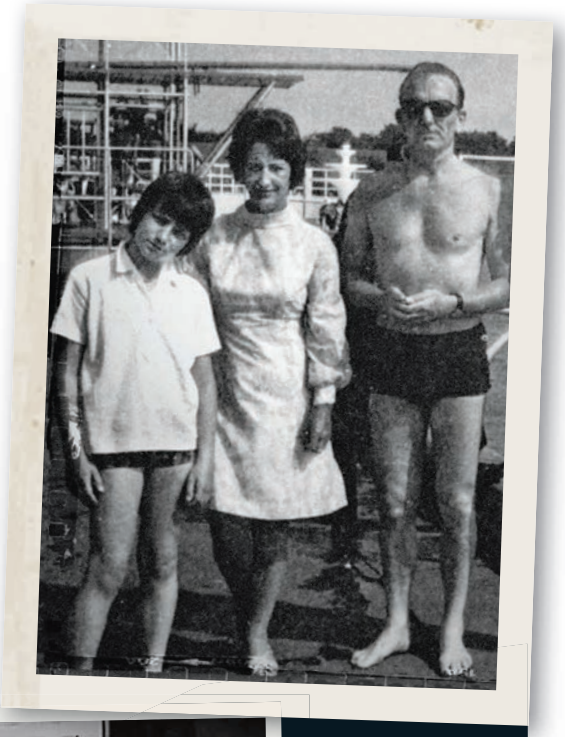
As song after song emerged in the early sessions, the band dared to dream that it might be easy this time. "I was feeling really good at the beginning," says Mullen. "'Shit, this is going to really work out. We're going to fly through this stuff.' Boy, oh boy, was I wrong."

If anything, they became suspicious of how smoothly it was going. "It had an amazing freshness," says Clayton, "but what happens in our process – and this is the difference between, say, us and the Rolling Stones – is that perhaps the Stones would say, 'We *could* finish it in six months, but let's do it in the next *two* months and get out and tour.' And that's not disparaging to them. Whereas we look at it and go, 'Six months, finish it? Nah, we'll take a year.'" He laughs hard. "And as you keep layering on the material, things that sounded fresh start to sound a little bit too innocent, a little bit unsophisticated."

Danger Mouse's favorite U2 albums are *Pop* and *Achtung Baby*, and he seemed to push the band in that experimental vein: "There's a part of U2 he's not interested in at all – anything he feels he's heard before or is ordinary," Clayton told me early in the sessions. By last year, the band had a set of songs that could have been released – apparently guitar-light, electronics-heavy, with uncharacteristically subtle choruses (the *Zooropa*-ish "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight" is probably the most characteristic survivor).

"We love taking risks and working with new collaborators, because that's how you carve out the next chapter in the story," says the Edge. "But then we realized, 'OK, we've actually not delivered what you might call the hallmarks of our work – the *big music*.' We were mixing in New York and going, 'This is good, but we've still got some work to do here.'"

Iovine agreed. "They needed to get themselves in a place where that intensity was in the room," he says. "And that's not easy to do."



YOUNG PUNKS

Above: Bono circa the early 1970s with mother Iris, who died when he was 14, and father Bob. Left: Edge, Mullen, Bono and Clayton (from left) in 1978.

Danger Mouse went off to work with Broken Bells, his duo with the Shins' James Mercer, and U2 reached out to Epworth and Tedder, along with *Zooropa* co-producer Flood and Irish engineer-producer Declan Gaffney. Past U2 albums benefited from opposing perspectives, pitting, say, Brian Eno's ear for atmosphere against Steve Lillywhite's radar for hits. Intentionally or not, they re-created that dynamic for *Songs of Innocence*: Danger Mouse has cast himself as an "auteur" producer, but the band and its new collaborators didn't hold back on changes to his tracks. "I have the utmost respect for Danger Mouse," says Tedder. "Bono was very straightforward. He was like, 'This is how we work. You're going to do whatever you do and get it as good as you can, and then more than likely *your* stuff is going to get messed with by somebody else.' So I hesitated for, like, five seconds, and then Edge was like, 'Man, tear it apart. Do what you want.'"

Tedder did some of his most radical surgery on "Every Breaking Wave," which had been a lyrical but meandering *No Line* outtake. "It's about how hard it is to give yourself completely to another person," says Bono. "And the two characters in it are addicted to sort of failure and rebirth."

"I just asked them, 'Is it cool if I just butcher this thing?'" says Tedder, who alternated between joining U2 in the studio and working remotely on the tracks. "And they were like, 'Do your worst. Go for it.'" He added a new chorus melody, turned the old chorus into a bridge, and sent it back to the bandmates. They reworked it on his model, ending up with a tight, hooky pop song, albeit one with lines like "Every shipwrecked soul knows what it is/To live without intimacy."

As they traveled the world to record, the band members found themselves sharing living quarters, which helped them reclaim some of the intimacy of their early years – sometimes perhaps too much so. "In Malibu, it was Adam, me and Larry," says Bono, grinning. "And the sight of Adam in his dressing robe in the morning – often open – is enough to put you off your poached eggs. My daughter is still traumatized! But, you know, he's there with his cup of tea, going, 'How are you this morning? How do you think that all went?' And then Larry didn't seem to get up in the daylight. He turned into Dracula. He was doing drum takes at 2:00 in the morning."

Rick Rubin, who produced a pile of mostly unreleased U2 songs a few years back, had a major influence on this album, despite not actually working on it. Rubin told Bono that U2 use their skill at sculpting unique soundscapes "to disguise the fact that you don't have a song." He pushed them to write traditionally structured tunes that would work with, say, voice and piano. "Someone like Adele makes better records than everyone else because her songs are better," says Bono. "In a great song, you can be as naked as a streaker singing a cappella. I'm embarrassed next to someone like Carole King, unless I can come up with something that's as raw as

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE HEWSON FAMILY; PATRICK BROCKLEBANK

some of her great songs. So that was it. Songwriting school!"

In the end, the Apple deal gave U2 what they needed most: a deadline. Many of the songs made major leaps in the final stretch. "It was quite a thrilling ride the last few weeks," says Gaffney. "All the pieces start to fit – it gained a certain level of clarity that you didn't see coming, and then it was right there in front of you, finished."

Burton returned for some final sessions; Mullen suggests the producer was taken aback by what he heard, but he stuck around to help them finish. "To come back in and hear things that he started, being changed around," says Mullen, "and feeling that it maybe should have been done slightly differently – that takes a certain amount of humility. He was very gracious – he took the lead and went, 'If this is the way that you're going, there is a different version of this that might work better.'"

"They're not my tracks," Burton says, via e-mail. "They're U2's tracks. I'm not happy about a song if they're not happy. Even after years of working on stuff, the guys won't stop trying to make a song better all the way up to the end, and I admire that."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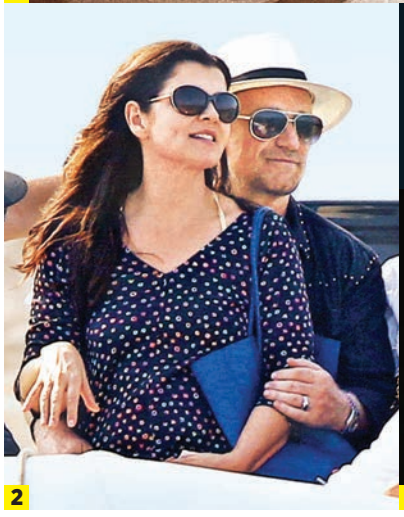
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GET ON YOUR BOOTS

On the 360° Tour in Australia, 2010 **(1)**; Bono and wife Ali earlier this year **(2)**; with Steve Jobs in 2004 **(3)**.

BONO IS FINISHING UP AT THE pub, but before he leaves, he has to pose for all the photos he promised to fans who tried to interrupt us. "I'll be Bono," he told one young woman who double-checked his identity. "I can be anyone you want me to be." He's crestfallen to learn that another patron, a German woman who wanted to "make a photo" to send home to her estranged U2-fan dad, has already been tossed out of the pub. "Her dad is a U2 fan," he says. "I have to look after the dude."

Finishing his last photo, he makes his way over to Coppinger Row, a restaurant around the corner. Our party has more or less taken over the place, commanding a bunch of tables pushed together. At the far end is Bono's wife, Ali, who's deep in conversation with the members of the Colorado band the Fray, in town for a show. "My wife is romantically and socially and spiritually inclined in the direction of Joe from the Fray," says Bono. "They're just great friends."

Bono is a highly enthusiastic host, bouncing around the table, getting cheerfully tipsy on a seemingly random selection of beverages: wine, a margarita, a flavored gin and tonic with various fruits floating in it. When one of his guests confesses ignorance of the Irish troubles, Bono happily offers a concise but decades-spanning history.

Well past midnight, champagne arrives, and Bono offers a series of toasts to his friends. "We want to welcome the Fray, who are clearly frayed at the edges as we speak," he says. "And one thing I'll say to you – in Ireland, it's in every writer's diary: Beware of the cradle at the bottom of the stairs. That's all I'll say to you." He sits down, but then there are more toasts: We drink to Bob Dylan, to Leonard Cohen. Late in the evening, a shot of tequila appears in front of me, unbidden. (Any iTunes user could probably guess how it got there.)

As dinner winds down, Bono announces, "The missus and I are off to do something unspeakable." They adjourn to the restaurant's front section, where they hold hands across a table while sharing a cigarette. It is, Bono recognizes, a moment almost sickening in its wholesomeness. What kind of self-respecting drunk rock star sneaks off to cuddle with his wife of 32 years?

"My ideas about love are probably very unromantic," he tells me later, in a discussion about "Every Breaking Wave." "I see love as a decision not made in the heat of the moment. I see it as an enduring thing that doesn't depend on feelings to verify it, though it's great when they do. And, in the end, love is often DNA tricking you into making a much bigger commitment. It's what happened to me, before I even knew what commitment was. I ended up as a young man in the arms of this young woman, in a world somewhat hostile to the concept of the childhood sweetheart and a first love."

"IRIS," PERHAPS THE MOST EXcruciatingly personal song in U2's catalog, was one of the last *Songs of Innocence* tracks to take shape, coming together in the last hours of the sessions. It's a song about Bono's mom, who died when he was just 14. He rewrote the lyrics after being deeply affected by the letter the late ISIS hostage James Foley passed on to his family through another prisoner. "I realized," he says, "that we will all be remembered by the least-

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RICHARD SHARMAN/RETNA PICTURES/PHOTOSHOT; TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES; LPI/X17ONLINE.COM

profound moments. The simplest moments. In the letter he says to his brother, 'I remember playing werewolf in the dark with you.'

"If I make a swift exit, stage left," Bono says, with a meditative sip of Guinness, "my family and friends won't be thinking about debt cancellation or fighting for HIV/AIDS medication, or U2 being on the cover of Rolling Stone, or 50 million people hearing *Songs of Innocence*. They might remember some stupid face I made at breakfast. And that's what I remember of my mother. Like being buried in the sand up to my head, or her saying, 'You'll be the death of me.'"

The album is the closest thing Bono has come to therapy, something he's managed to avoid his whole life, save for one week in his teens. "When I was a teenager, I had a violent period," Bono recalls. "I had an altercation with a teacher where I might have, in front of the whole class, put him up against the blackboard and told him to stop picking on this one person in the class, which I really couldn't stand. So I was sent to this very clever woman and at the end of seven days, she said, 'Go home.'"

It's bizarre, almost, that Bono is only now delving into his early life in his songs, on U2's 13th studio album, at age 54. (As one old friend told him in an e-mail, "All this way to make your first album!") And Bono being Bono, he has a follow-up album in mind: He hopes to put out *Songs of Experience* as soon as 18 months from now. The idea, in theory, is to have the indoor *Songs of Innocence* tour jump outdoors when the companion album comes out. "We're hoping *Songs of Experience* will be less about intimacy," says Clayton, "and more about a celebration of sorts."

Bono has a habit of announcing unfinished albums, something he also did five years ago, telling me that U2 would quickly release a more meditative *No Line* follow-up from the same sessions, called *Songs of Ascent*. (That one has yet to surface, and it's unclear how much work it would take to finish it.) "*Songs of Experience* has to feel like it's justified, that it's relevant," says Clayton. "And if we don't feel it's very good, then I imagine we'll just scrap it, and it'll become something else."

"I've grown to expect it from Bono," says Mullen. "If he *didn't* announce it, that would be the surprise. That's what he does, that's who he is."

As if to prove that the album is truly in progress, Bono recites what seems to be the entire lyric of a song called "The Morning After Innocence" that's built around dialogue between his younger and older selves. "Lead me in the way I should go," he'll sing in the chorus, assuming it ever is released. "I'm running out of chances to blow/That's what you told me, and you should know/Lead me in the way I should be/Unravel the mystery of the heart and its defense/The morning after innocence."

And, by the way, he's still promising to release that other phantom album, now as the third of what he sees as a *Songs* trilogy. "*Songs of Ascent* will come," he says. "And there are some beautiful songs."

Back on the French Riviera, U2's rehearsal has died down, and Bono and I head back to the villas he and the Edge share along the coast. As a bodyguard steers us through dark, winding mountain roads, Bono ponders how long U2 can last, and what it might take for them to stop. "We've been living by a 'one crap album and you're out' rule," he says, as we pass through the porous border between Monaco and France. "There's albums people like more than others, but nobody thinks we've made a lazy piece of work yet. But the question of 'how long' still has to be asked – and I don't think it's answered by 'until we fall over.' We have to proceed with no sense of entitlement."

Arriving at the property, past a metal gate and an ancient-looking tunnel, we get out of the car. It's a starless night, with a nearly full moon casting its sparkling reflection over the Mediterranean. Bono offers a quick history of this retreat: Mullen and Clayton had a chance to share the purchase years ago, but were spooked by the then-dilapidated condition of the main house. Bono and the Edge bought the property for around $3 million – it's apparently worth far more now – and originally intended to sell the big house, a pinkish-orange mansion. But as kids came along, and kept coming, this place became a haven for their families.

"This is a good record," says Mullen. "I could accept going down in flames on this. But not 'No Line on the Horizon.'"

"The kids bring their friends, and we don't know who's their friends and who are our friends," says Bono. "There's music and mayhem and swimming and an actual life here." He shows me to a cabana-like nook on the marble terrace, with pristine white couches facing the sea. Songs from a playlist heavy on 1970s Bowie play from invisible speakers. Inside, house staff have snacks ready in the kitchen. There's an elevator if you don't feel like climbing stairs.

It is, in short, paradise. Or at least not the sort of place that would, in normal humans, breed the kind of existential hunger that might inspire years of obsessive recording and rerecording. The members of U2 seem aware that there's something almost pathological within their collective ethos that compels them to believe, against pretty much all historical precedent, that a rock band can still make new fans, record new hits and get better in their mid-fifties.

"We're not fighting anybody else except ourselves," says Mullen, sitting two weeks earlier in a restaurant overlooking a harbor in the Irish Sea. "So it is a really good question: 'Why bother?' Why not take three years off, go take care of your family? And then maybe get together and record something and go on the road and do a greatest-hits tour. And make shitloads of money, like everybody else. Make an absolute fortune. No one will think ill of you. But, no. These guys will go into the studio for four years, cost them a fortune.

"Maybe we're stupid. I don't know," Mullen continues, with a pause that all but dares me to express agreement. "Or maybe we're really clever. And maybe we really care about what we do. I could easily accept going down in flames on this album – if U2 would never record again, I'd go, 'OK.' This is a really good record. To go down in flames on *No Line on the Horizon* – that I was not prepared to do. So maybe that's what this is about."

For Bono, the answer is even simpler. "Most of our best work is fired up with the idea of 'If only people could hear this song,'" he says. He's taken his sunglasses off, and direct contact with his blue-gray eyes is mildly unsettling. "And here's a question for you: Why isn't everybody like this? Why do *we* look mad because we want it like we always have? Everyone else gets to play the 'been there, done that, sonny' card. I don't get it! I mean, some of the most incredible minds and sacred talents haven't bothered their arse in years! They put out lazy work.

"But U2's gone about this like it's our first album. And as the gunpowder fades, there are songs there. Songs where we can get all our contemporaries and everyone in a room and say, 'This is what I've got.' And if somebody comes up with one better than 'Every Breaking Wave,' you know, let's hear it." Off in the distance, under the glowing moon, the ocean is completely still, not a wave in sight. Bono leans in, and repeats himself: "It's a better question, isn't it? Why isn't everyone like this?"