

Ready to Pack Up Your Bags and Go?

This account of New York rock in the aughts is just as epic as the city itself—and reminded me why I wanted to move here in the first place.

By Chanel Parks (@chanelinezp)



In 2006, at 15 years old, I finally figured out how to illegally download music to my new iPod Nano. It meant running to my friend's house—a friend lucky enough to have her own computer and a decent internet connection. With my iPod and USB cable in tow, I took it upon myself to rip four albums: The Strokes's *Is This It*, *Room on Fire*, *First Impressions of Earth*, and Yeah Yeah Yeahs's *Fever to Tell*.

Up until that point, my only interaction with these albums had been catching the singles on MTV and VH1 for years. Since the bands' music videos instantly lifted me out of my familiar world, I lusted after the universe they inhabited: a gritty New York that I was internally begging to be part of, fashion- and culture-wise.



Karen O (in typical, amazing costume garb) and Nick Zinner of Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

I asked my mom to buy me a pair of Chucks because Strokes drummer Fabrizio Moretti wore them in the “Reptilia” video and I’d decided that “cool New Yorkers” wore them. My mom refused; the sneakers were too flat for my collapsing arches and the name Fabrizio had no effect on her.

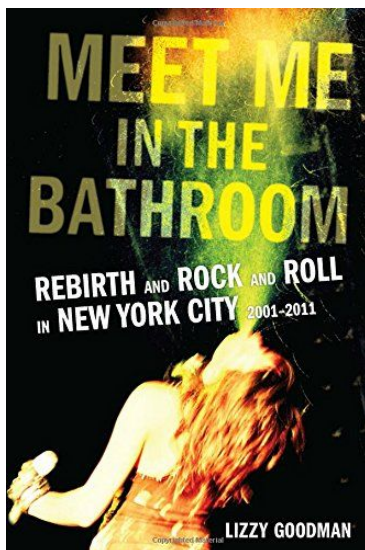
I stood mesmerized one afternoon watching the different colored lights illuminate Karen O’s face in the video for “Maps.” I decided the ever-flashing lights were a metaphor for the city that never sleeps. But, of course, they probably weren’t.

These bands weren’t just singing and playing for my entertainment. They’d built an aesthetic through guitar solos, eccentric vocals, and way-too-real lyrics that sold me on the New York dream—a dingy, rough, cool-certified escape from suburban life perfect for an adolescent girl who spent too much time by herself.



Lead singer of The Strokes Julian Casablancas sings from the floor during their “\$2 Bill” performance for MTV2. Photograph courtesy of J. Vespa/Getty Images

When I picked up Lizzy Goodman’s *Meet Me in the Bathroom* about a month ago, I immediately cracked it open the night it fell into my hands. The book is a massive oral history of New York City’s rock and roll scene between 2001 and 2011—an influential decade that spawned The Strokes and Yeah Yeah Yeahs, but other amazing acts such as TV on the Radio, Interpol, and there’s even a bit of Vampire Weekend in the mix.



“Meet Me in the Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Roll in New York City, 2001-2011” by Lizzy Goodman, \$21, harpercollins.com.

I usually scrunch my nose at the sight of a nonfiction book, because fantastical universes and extremely dramatic plot lines are my bread and butter when it comes to consuming anything. But what's so enticing about Goodman's compilation (and musical history as a genre) is that while it presents IRL encounters between rock stars, it still gives those figures an electric and mythic appeal. Even when they're trying to be relatable and recounting humble beginnings, these musicians have still been on television, performed for sold-out arenas, and are highly Googleable, which is a high pedestal to come down from.



Lizzy Goodman, the author, is a journalist who's covered culture, music, and fashion.

From start to finish, the candid interviews do break down some walls, though, and we get to know some of the tragedy and darkness behind the music—that's where the drugs, sex, and drama come in. But at the same time, the narrative takes historical snapshots of a city that's succumbed to harsh changes, even in the past 15 years. Brooklyn, now bustling with hipster culture, was still dangerous territory in the early aughts. And the East Village was less brotastic and more a mecca for hustling and grassroots promotion, and where a lot more dank, divey, and cheap bars still existed.



That's the New York I wanted, even as a scaredy-cat teen who relied on her mom in northern Virginia. Although I still lament the fact that I'll never get to experience what New York was like in 2001, 2003, or even 2006, I have Goodman to thank for opening up the floodgates and sharing, through the voices of others, what that fucked up fairytale land was like.

And in case you were wondering, I did move to New York. Despite its expensive rent, yuppie takeover, and extremely crowded trains, there's no place I'd rather be.