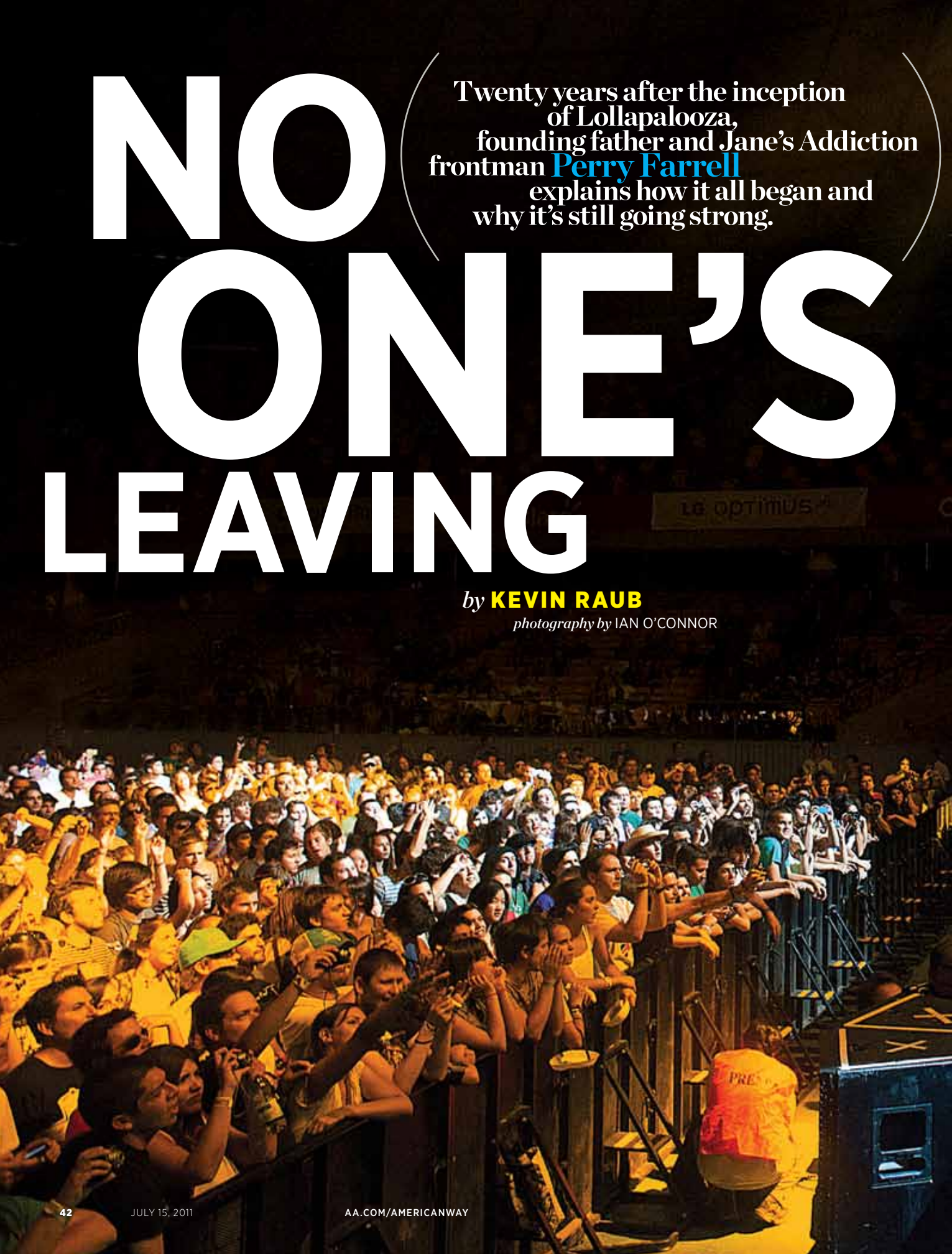
NO ONE'S LEAVING

Twenty years after the inception of Lollapalooza, founding father and Jane's Addiction frontman **Perry Farrell** explains how it all began and why it's still going strong.

by **KEVIN RAUB**

photography by IAN O'CONNOR




claro

Perry Farrell has always been a sonic prophet, possessing an uncanny ability to look into his loopy crystal ball and see the future of music. Such insight was never more evident than with Lollapalooza, the traveling music festival tour he conceived as a sound off for one of alternative rock's most influential bands, Jane's Addiction, in 1991. But here we are 20 years later, and it seems Farrell's prophesying has gone cold. Backstage at Lollapalooza Chile in Santiago (the first time the festival has traveled beyond U.S. borders), Farrell decides it's a good idea to do an interview while hanging out with his two kids, 8-year-old Hezron and 6-year-old Izzadore, inside the festival's built-in kiddie park, appropriately titled Kidzapalooza. Bad idea.

Within minutes, Farrell is mobbed by a Latin fan club — an emotional bunch — most of whom are using their kids as mediums to get his attention. It's mostly good-hearted, though, as many Chileans want nothing more than to tell Farrell "gracias" for bringing his pioneering music festival to the world's narrowest country. Still, handlers grow increasingly concerned as the crowd approaches Beatlemania levels, and security is called in to restore order. Farrell and entourage are then whisked away to the safer confines of the backstage area. Lesson learned.

Besides the quick tutorial in mob mentality, the irony of the situation is palpable: Farrell, the lead singer of Jane's Addiction, a band that helped to pioneer eccentric sights and sounds far outside the mainstream, has become a messiah of sorts for the masses. He is keeping the dream alive in a day and age where some kids think music is born on an iPod. Twenty years ago today, who would have thought it? Well, Farrell, that's who.

The two-day Chilean Lollapalooza in April acted as a cultural attaché for the 20th-anniversary American counterpart, set for Aug. 5-7 in Chicago's Grant Park. Several South American bands are heading north for the Chicago edition, including local favorites Chico Trujillo, Los Bunkers and Ana Tijoux, and they will join a wallop of a lineup that includes Eminem, Coldplay and Foo Fighters. It's an astonishing feat if you think about it: These days, what in music lasts 20 years? Maybe a well-built Fender? Not much else.

BEFORE THE INCEPTION OF LOLLAPALOOZA, American music festivals were in a major rut — especially when compared with those in Europe and Australia. There were some historic one-off exceptions (Woodstock and the Altamont Speedway festival, both in 1969, come to mind) and a few scattered annual festivals across the country, like Jazz Fest in New Orleans and Milwaukee's Summerfest, which were inaugurated in 1970 and 1968, respectively, and Seattle's Bumbershoot Festival, whose origins date back to 1971. Prior to Lollapalooza, though, there was no Coachella, Bonnaroo or Vans Warped Tour, all hugely successful festivals that are now firmly planted in the annual U.S. music calendar. Most notable, though, is that before Lollapalooza's debut in 1991, no music festival had ever hit the road — packing, unpacking and repacking its stages, merch booths, soundboards and bands — for folks to enjoy across the country in a variety of cities. A festival tour.

Lollapalooza was so successful and groundbreaking that it quickly became part of the vernacular: Like friending someone or tweeting something, you could "palooza" anything to signify a no-holds-barred party: Baby showers became Babypaloozas. Luke Wilson's frat party in *Old School* became Mitch-a-Palooza. (Don't quote me, but I

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Snapshots from Lollapalooza Chile: Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros; skateboarders on the half-pipe; Jane's Addiction fans; welcoming signage

wouldn't be surprised if Bonnaroo's organizers didn't once consider Bonnaroopalooza.) Was Farrell crazy? No. It turns out he just wanted to throw Perrypalooza.

"You have to understand, since the beginning of my career as a musician, I have always put on my own parties," Farrell explains. "The underground [bands] in Los Angeles — they didn't play on the Sunset Strip because of the pay-to-play policy that was rampant at that time. To push back against that, the underground found venues like lofts, or we would go out to the desert and put on shows. So, I started to learn how to put on my own shows almost as a defense mechanism to stay alive. I couldn't afford to pay anybody to play their venue.

"With Jane's Addiction, we always put on our own shows," he continues. "So I had done these parties before, but now I'm thinking on a much larger scale. Last licks for Jane's Addiction were in 1991. We had a lot of juice, and we're riding high. We'd been on the road for an 18-month tour and my agent, Marc Geiger, said to me, 'Do whatever you want.' ... So I came back to him with a long list of artists I wanted to tour with, along with the idea of having art, hot-air balloons, helicopters — I think I overreached in those days."

Helicopters and hot-air balloons didn't happen, but nonetheless, Lollapalooza was born. The name, an out-of-date idiomatic term meaning "an extraordinary or unusual thing, person, or event; an exceptional example or instance," which Farrell had heard in a Three Stooges short film, was as enigmatic as the idea: Let's hit the road with numerous bands of wildly contrary genres — Ice-T's Body Count was paired with Siouxsie and the Banshees and Living Colour in year one — and lug as much culture, art and activism as far as the ride will carry us. That clashing of genres in that initial lineup — and in every one since — was essentially a pre-Apple version of the iPod Shuffle. "All of this predates the iPod," Farrell says. "The iPod was invented a few years later, and people did start to collect music and spread out their musical horizons, because now you had something that could hold lots of music. Before that, you had a record collection, but you just put it on this one little turnstile. Now you have this little box you can fill up with lots of different things."

It was those many different things that also led Lollapalooza to another groundbreaking concept at the time: multiple stages. First, there was just a side stage. By 1996, there was an indie stage too. In Chicago this August, there will be no fewer than eight stages. "We introduced the idea of a second stage and third stage and fourth stage and fifth stage," Farrell says. "Before that, it was a stage."

It is an excellent metaphor for the growth of the festival itself, though the inevitable speed bumps began creeping onto the stage. The first came in 1994, when scheduled headliners Nirvana pulled out of the festival just one day before Kurt Cobain's tragic suicide. "I was in pretty bad shape myself," remembers Farrell, referring to his own struggles with addiction. "I was living with this girl whose brother was a big Nirvana fan. The night before that happened, I got a

"The underground [bands] in Los Angeles — they didn't play on the Sunset Strip because of the pay-to-play policy ... I started to learn how to put on my own shows almost as a defense mechanism to stay alive. I couldn't afford to pay anybody to play their venue."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Fans shade themselves at Lollapalooza Chile; Perry and Etty Farrell; Farrell and his sons Izzadore (center) and Hezron (right) at Kidzapalooza; Farrell performing at Lollapalooza in 1992

call from Courtney Love, asking me where [Kurt] was. I didn't know. Then he killed himself, and my girlfriend's brother did a copycat suicide and shot himself with a rifle as well. To tell you the truth, I was almost numb to everything anyway."

Despite the tragedy, Farrell sees the 1994 edition of Lollapalooza as a turning point for the festival. Smashing Pumpkins took over the slot that Nirvana left vacant, and Farrell counts Cobain's suicide as the catalyst for Lollapalooza's finding its true way. "I thought Nirvana doing it was great, but I must admit, I was annoyed," Farrell says. "Jane's Addiction broke through and made the way for all these alternative groups to come through. But Nirvana came barreling through that door. As a human being and a musician, sometimes you want the same successes. But all added up, I was happy for them; they were true artists with great talent. Sometimes people say that when people die, what they stood for kind of explodes into the sky for people to grab. In a weird way, when Kurt died, all that music exploded into the sky and people grabbed that energy up. That was year four. That's when Lollapalooza really came into its own."

From there, Lollapalooza enjoyed a seriously fun run for the next few years — even on the Sabbath (Farrell is Jewish). "I had a guy who would travel with me," recalls Farrell. "He was a seriously hooked-up gangster kid from New York, but also a bass tech. I remember on every Friday, we would have unpasteurized cheese flown in from France or Italy, and we would have these parties backstage — the wine, the cheese, the olives and these great cured meats. It was a social event for everyone."

"Jane's Addiction broke through and made the way for all these alternative groups to come through. But Nirvana came barreling through that door. As a human being and a musician, sometimes you want the same successes."

Unfortunately, by the end of the '90s, the party began losing steam. A combination of factors was responsible for Lollapalooza's decline: Alternative rock — still the festival's foundation, despite its embracing of hip-hop and electronica — was seemingly dead in the water (the record skipped a little after Cobain's suicide, then screeched completely with Pearl Jam's boycotting of Ticketmaster, a move that essentially prevented the group from touring major venues nationwide); copycat festivals like Lilith Fair and the Vans Warped Tour were diluting potential audiences; and the concert industry — specifically tour promotion and venue management — had become big business run not by hippie holdout superfans willing to open their backyards to 30,000 screaming kids but by corporate suits who cared more about profits than paloozas. The amps were unplugged on Lollapalooza in 1998.

"One of the stipulations I always had for Lollapalooza was: I don't play anywhere with screwed-in seats," Farrell says. "You find me a field. I'd rather be [there] than in an amphitheater. As a musician, I have certain insights. You cannot have a great party when people are just sitting there and are not allowed to move left or right before the usher comes over and says, 'Behave yourself!' That's not Lollapalooza. But we began to have no choice; there were fewer and fewer fields. And then it became a business where we weren't building it and putting our money into it — the corporation would tell you how much money you had to play with. I wasn't

PERRY 1992: JOHN STOREY/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

enjoying the idea of it anymore."

A five-year silence followed. But a funny thing happened to the music business in its absence: file sharing. Suddenly, music was being downloaded for free with reckless abandon (it still is) and the record labels, either through legislation or business models, couldn't figure out a way to stop it or make money from it (and they still can't). Profits plummeted, leaving musicians to begin earning the bulk of their incomes from touring and merch sales instead of record sales. That bid seemingly well for Lollapalooza. In 2003, it returned — ironically enough as a platform to launch Jane's Addiction's reunion. Unfortunately, it was only to modest successes, and a year later, weak ticket sales forced its cancellation yet again.

"It broke my heart," Farrell recalls. "That same week, my guys in Jane's Addiction announced to *Rolling Stone* they were leaving to start another group. It was probably the saddest week of my life. You have to understand, musicians are full of themselves. However, we are probably the most insecure human beings. We constantly need our egos stroked. For good reason — you have a career that is riding on your current record. If it doesn't do well, your record label drops you, what are you going to do? You can't even go work in a record store: There aren't any left!"

It wasn't until 2005, when Farrell teamed up with Capital Sports & Entertainment (now C3 Presents) to stage the festival as a one-off weekend in one location in the grand tradition of the world's most successful music festivals, like Glastonbury and Reading in the U.K., and Roskilde in Denmark, that Lollapalooza pumped up the volume again. Farrell and C3 scoured the country looking for the perfect field. Farrell found it in Grant Park, where the festival has thrived ever since. "We went to all the major cities in the United States, but Chicago had its own charms, similar to Chile," explains Farrell. "Since the '70s, [Santiago] has had a democratic attitude and it honors its arts. Art changes the character and the consciousness of its citizens. And they are on to it."

Farrell counts Lollapalooza's rebirth in Chicago — and now Santiago, where the raging success of this year's event bodes well for future festivals — as his most unlikely achievement along the way. "My biggest triumph was resurrecting Lollapalooza from the ashes, because in this business, you don't get second chances. Once your festival goes down in this business, it's never the same. I don't know how I'm so fortunate. I'll have to sit down some day and think about it."

Lollapalooza and Chicago have agreed to their musical marriage through 2018. After that, Farrell isn't worried. "I hate to come off with such a relaxed attitude about something as heavy as Lolla, but when we get there, we'll either renegotiate with Chicago or try to find some other field."

KEVIN RAUB is a São Paulo-based travel and entertainment journalist. His work appears regularly in *Town & Country*, *Guitar Aficionado* and *Time Out: São Paulo*, among other publications. His memory of his first few Lollapaloozas are as hazy as some of Farrell's memories. But he was there, he swears. You can find him these days at www.kevinraub.net.