

= Smells Like Teen Spirit =

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " is a song by the American rock band Nirvana . It is the opening track and lead single from the band 's second album , Nevermind (1991) , released on DGC Records . Written by Kurt Cobain , Krist Novoselic , and Dave Grohl (lyrics by Cobain , music by Nirvana) and produced by Butch Vig , the song uses a verse @-@ chorus form where the main four @-@ chord riff is used during the intro and chorus to create an alternating loud and quiet dynamic . The sound of the song (as Cobain admitted) is modeled after the sound of the Pixies .

The unexpected success of " Smells Like Teen Spirit " in late 1991 propelled Nevermind to the top of the charts at the start of 1992 , an event often marked as the point where alternative rock entered the mainstream . " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was Nirvana 's biggest hit , reaching number six on the Billboard Hot 100 and placing high on music industry charts all around the world in 1991 and 1992 .

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " received many critical plaudits , including topping the Village Voice Pazz & Jop critics ' poll and winning two MTV Video Music Awards for its music video , which was in heavy rotation on music television . The song was dubbed an " anthem for apathetic kids " of Generation X , but the band grew uncomfortable with the success and attention it received as a result . In the years since Cobain 's death , listeners and critics have continued to praise " Smells Like Teen Spirit " as one of the greatest songs of all time .

= = Origins and recording = =

In a January 1994 Rolling Stone interview , Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain revealed that " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was an attempt to write a song in the style of the Pixies , a band he greatly admired . He explained :

I was trying to write the ultimate pop song . I was basically trying to rip off the Pixies . I have to admit it . When I heard the Pixies for the first time , I connected with that band so heavily that I should have been in that band ? or at least a Pixies cover band . We used their sense of dynamics , being soft and quiet and then loud and hard .

Cobain did not begin to write " Smells Like Teen Spirit " until a few weeks before recording started on Nirvana 's second album , Nevermind , in 1991 . When he first presented the song to his bandmates , it comprised just the main riff and the chorus vocal melody , which bassist Krist Novoselic dismissed at the time as " ridiculous . " In response , Cobain made the band play the riff for " an hour and a half . " In a 2001 interview , Novoselic recalled that after playing the riff repeatedly , he thought , " ' Wait a minute . Why don 't we just kind of slow this down a bit ? ' So I started playing the verse part . And Dave [started] playing a drum beat . " As a result , it is the only song on Nevermind to credit all three band members as authors .

Cobain came up with the song 's title when his friend Kathleen Hanna , at the time the lead singer of the riot grrrl band Bikini Kill , wrote " Kurt Smells Like Teen Spirit " on his wall . Since they had been discussing anarchism , punk rock , and similar topics , Cobain interpreted the slogan as having a revolutionary meaning . What Hanna actually meant , however , was that Cobain smelled like the deodorant Teen Spirit , which his then @-@ girlfriend Tobi Vail wore . Cobain later claimed he was unaware that it was a brand of deodorant until months after the single was released .

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " was , along with " Come as You Are " , one of a few new songs that had been written since Nirvana 's first recording sessions with producer Butch Vig in 1990 . Prior to the start of the Nevermind recording sessions , the band sent Vig a rough cassette demo of song rehearsals that included " Teen Spirit " . While the sound of the tape was wildly distorted due to the band playing at a loud volume , Vig could pick out some of the melody and felt the song had promise . Nirvana recorded " Smells Like Teen Spirit " at Sound City recording studio in Van Nuys , California with Vig in May 1991 . Vig suggested some arrangement changes to the song , including moving a guitar ad lib into the chorus , and trimming down the chorus length . The band recorded the basic track for the song in three takes , and decided to keep the second one . Vig incorporated some sonic corrections into the basic live band performance because Cobain had timing difficulties when switching between his guitar effects pedals . Vig was only able to get three vocal takes from

Cobain ; the producer commented , " I was lucky to ever get Kurt to do four takes . "

= = Composition = =

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " follows a F ? B ? ? A ? ? D ? chord progression , with the main guitar riff constructed from four power chords played in a syncopated sixteenth note strum by Cobain . The guitar chords were double tracked because the band " wanted to make it sound more powerful , " according to Vig . The chords occasionally lapse into suspended chord voicings as a result of Cobain playing the bottom four strings of the guitar for the thickness of sound . Listeners made many comments that the song bore a passing resemblance to Boston 's 1976 hit " More Than a Feeling " . Cobain himself held similar opinions , saying that it " was such a clichéd riff . It was so close to a Boston riff or [The Kingsmen 's] ' Louie Louie . ' " However , Rikky Rooksby points out that " Smells Like Teen Spirit " and " More Than a Feeling " follow different chord progressions .

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " uses a " somewhat conventional formal structure " consisting of four- , eight- , and twelve @-@ bar sections that includes an eight @-@ bar verse , an eight @-@ bar first chorus (pre @-@ chorus) , and a twelve @-@ bar second chorus (main chorus) . Musicologist Graeme Downes , who led the band The Verlaines , says that " Smells Like Teen Spirit " illustrates developing variation . Elements of the song 's structure are marked off with shifts in volume and dynamics , going back and forth from quiet to loud a number of times during the length of the recording . This structure of " quiet verses with wobbly , chorused guitar , followed by big , loud hardcore @-@ inspired choruses " became a much @-@ emulated template in alternative rock because of " Teen Spirit " .

During the verses the band maintains the same chord progression as the chorus . Cobain plays a two @-@ note guitar line over Novoselic 's root @-@ note eighth note bassline , which outlines the chord progression . As the song moves closer to the choruses , Cobain begins to play the same two notes on every beat of the measure and repeats the word " Hello " . Following the first and second choruses , Cobain simultaneously sings the word " Yay " and performs a unison bend on his guitar . After the second chorus , Cobain plays a 16 @-@ bar guitar solo that almost completely restates his vocal melody from the verse and pre @-@ chorus . During the closing refrain , Cobain sings " A denial " repeatedly ; his voice becomes strained and is almost shot from the force of yelling .

= = Release , success , and acclaim = =

Issued to radio on August 27 , 1991 , " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was released two weeks later on September 10 as the lead single from Nevermind , the band 's major label debut on DGC Records . The song did not initially chart , and it sold well only in regions of the United States with an established fanbase for the group . " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was not expected to be a hit , for it was merely intended to be the base @-@ building alternative rock cut from the album . It was anticipated that the follow @-@ up single " Come as You Are " would be the song that could cross over to mainstream formats . However , campus radio and modern rock radio stations picked up on the track , and placed it on heavy rotation . Danny Goldberg of Nirvana 's management firm Gold Mountain later admitted that " none of us heard it as a crossover song , but the public heard it and it was instantaneous [. . .] They heard it on alternative radio , and then they rushed out like lemmings to buy it . " The video received its world premiere on MTV 's late @-@ night alternative rock program 120 Minutes , and proved so popular that the channel began to air it during its regular daytime rotation . MTV added the video to its " Buzz Bin " selection in October , where it stayed until mid @-@ December . By the end of the year , the song , its accompanying video , and the Nevermind album had become hits . Both the song and Nevermind became a rare cross @-@ format phenomenon , reaching all the major rock radio formats including modern rock , hard rock , album rock , and college radio .

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " became a critical and commercial success . The song topped the 1991 Village Voice " Pazz & Jop " and Melody Maker year @-@ end polls , and reached number two on Rolling Stone 's list of best singles of the year . The single peaked at number six on the Billboard

singles chart the same week that Nevermind reached number one on the albums chart . " Teen Spirit " hit number one on the Modern Rock Tracks chart , and has since been certified platinum (one million copies shipped) by the Recording Industry Association of America . However , many American Top 40 stations were reluctant to play the song in regular rotation due to its sound , and restricted it to night @-@ time play . The single was also successful in other countries . In the United Kingdom , " Smells Like Teen Spirit " reached number seven and charted for 184 weeks . The song was nominated for two Grammy Awards : Best Hard Rock Performance with Vocal and Best Rock Song . Entertainment Weekly would later name Nirvana 's loss to Eric Clapton in the Best Rock Song category as one of the 10 biggest upsets in Grammy history .

In the wake of Nirvana 's success , Michael Azerrad wrote in a 1992 Rolling Stone article , " ' Smells Like Teen Spirit ' is an anthem for (or is it against ?) the ' Why Ask Why ? ' generation . Just don 't call Cobain a spokesman for a generation . " Nevertheless , the music press awarded the song an " anthem @-@ of @-@ a @-@ generation " status , placing Cobain as a reluctant spokesman for Generation X. The New York Times observed that " ' Smells Like Teen Spirit ' could be this generation ? s version of the Sex Pistols ' 1976 single , ' Anarchy in the U.K. ' , if it weren ? t for the bitter irony that pervades its title , " and added , " As Nirvana knows only too well , teen spirit is routinely bottled , shrink @-@ wrapped and sold . " The band grew uncomfortable with the song 's success , and in later concerts often pointedly excluded it from the set list . Prior to the release of the band 's 1993 follow @-@ up album In Utero , Novoselic remarked , " If it wasn 't for ' Teen Spirit ' I don 't know how Nevermind would have done , " and observed , " There are no ' Teen Spirits ' on In Utero . " Cobain said in 1994 , " I still like playing ' Teen Spirit , ' but it 's almost an embarrassment to play it [. . .] Everyone has focused on that song so much . "

In the years following Cobain 's 1994 death and the band 's breakup , " Smells Like Teen Spirit " has continued to garner critical acclaim , and is now often listed as one of the greatest songs of all time . It was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 's list of " The Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll " in 1997 . In 2000 , VH1 rated the song at number forty @-@ one on its " 100 Greatest Rock Songs " list , while MTV and Rolling Stone ranked it third on their joint list of the " 100 Greatest Pop Songs " . The Recording Industry Association of America placed " Smells Like Teen Spirit " at number eighty on their 2001 " Songs of the Century " list . In 2002 , NME awarded the song the number two spot on its list of " 100 Greatest Singles of All Time " , with Kerrang ! ranking it at number one on its own list of the " 100 Greatest Singles of All Time " . VH1 placed " Smells Like Teen Spirit " at number one on its list of " 100 Greatest Songs of the Past 25 Years " in 2003 , while that same year , the song came third in a Q poll of the " 1001 Best Songs Ever " . In 2004 , Rolling Stone ranked " Smells Like Teen Spirit " ninth on its list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " , and described its impact as " a shock wave of big @-@ amp purity , " noting that " [it] wiped the lingering jive of the Eighties off the pop map overnight . " The song was placed at number six in NME 's " Global Best Song Ever Poll " in 2005 . In the 2006 VH1 UK poll The Nation 's Favourite Lyric , the line " I feel stupid and contagious / Here we are now , entertain us " was ranked as the third @-@ favorite song lyric among over 13 @,@ 000 voters . VH1 placed " Smells Like Teen Spirit " at number one on its list of the " 100 Greatest Songs Of The ' 90s " in 2007 , while Rolling Stone ranked it number ten on its list of " The 100 Greatest Guitar Songs of All Time " . In 2009 , the song was voted number one for the third time in a row on the Triple J Hottest 100 of All Time in Australia (it was first place previously in 1991 and 1998) . That same year , VH1 ranked the song seventh on its list of the " 100 Greatest Hard Rock Songs " . Despite previously proposing in its 2006 entry for Nevermind on " The All @-@ TIME 100 Albums " that " ' Smells Like Teen Spirit ' [. . .] may be the album 's worst song , " Time magazine later included it on its list of " The All @-@ TIME 100 Songs " in 2011 . That same year , " Smells Like Teen Spirit " kept its number nine ranking on Rolling Stone 's updated list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " . NME placed the song at number two on its list of the " 100 Best Tracks Of The ' 90s " in 2012 , and at number one on its list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " in 2014 . In 2015 , the song was also named the most iconic song of all time according to a study by Goldsmith 's College , which analysed various songs featured in numerous ' all @-@ time best ' lists , using analytical software to compare their key , BPM , chord variety , lyrical content , timbral variety , and sonic variance ? the result of which designated the title

to this song .

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " was re @-@ released as a limited edition 7 @-@ inch vinyl single in December 2011 . In an attempt to emulate a successful 2009 Facebook campaign to promote Rage Against the Machine 's song " Killing in the Name " , a similar online campaign has been launched to promote the Nirvana single to 2011 Christmas number one in the UK Singles Chart in protest at the dealings of The X Factor television series with the children 's charity Rhythmix . A similar campaign was also launched in Ireland to get the track to 2011 Christmas number one in the Irish Singles Chart . The campaign resulted in the song reaching number 11 on the UK Singles Chart , with 30 @, @ 000 copies sold .

= = Lyrics and interpretation = =

The lyrics to " Smells Like Teen Spirit " were often difficult for listeners to decipher , both due to their nonsensicality and because of Cobain 's slurred , guttural singing voice . This problem was compounded by the fact that the Nevermind album liner notes did not include any lyrics for the songs aside from selected lyrical fragments . This incomprehensibility contributed to the early resistance from radio stations towards adding the song to their playlists ; one Geffen promoter recalled that people from rock radio told her , " We can 't play this . I can 't understand what the guy is saying . " MTV went as far as to prepare a version of the video that included the lyrics running across the bottom of the screen , which they aired when the video was added to their heavy rotation schedule . The lyrics for the album ? and some from earlier or alternate versions of the songs ? were later released with the liner notes of the " Lithium " single in 1992 . American rock critic Dave Marsh noted comments by disc jockeys of the time that the song was " the ' Louie Louie ' of the nineties " and wrote , " Like ' Louie , ' only more so , ' Teen Spirit ' reveals its secrets reluctantly and then often incoherently . " Marsh , trying to decipher the lyrics of the song , felt after reading the correct lyrics from the song 's sheet music that " what I imagined was quite a bit better (at least , more gratifying) than what Nirvana actually sang , " and added , " Worst of all , I 'm not sure that I know more about [the meaning of] ' Smells Like Teen Spirit ' now than before I plunked down for the official version of the facts . "

" Teen Spirit " is widely interpreted to be a teen revolution anthem , an interpretation reinforced by the song 's music video . In an interview conducted the day Nevermind was released , Cobain stated the song was about his friends , explaining , " We still feel as if we 're teenagers because we don 't follow the guidelines of what 's expected of us to be adults [. . .] It also has kind of a teen revolutionary theme . " As Cobain did more interviews , he changed his explanation of the song and rarely gave specifics about the song 's meaning . When discussing the song in Michael Azerrad 's biography Come as You Are : The Story of Nirvana , Cobain revealed that he felt a duty " to describe what I felt about my surroundings and my generation and people my age . "

The book Teen Spirit : The Stories Behind Every Nirvana Song describes " Teen Spirit " as " a typically murky Cobain exploration of meaning and meaninglessness . " Azerrad plays upon the juxtaposition of Cobain 's contradictory lyrics (such as " It 's fun to lose and to pretend ") and states " the point that emerges isn 't just the conflict of two opposing ideas , but the confusion and anger that the conflict produces in the narrator ? he 's angry that he 's confused . " Azerrad 's conclusion is that the song is " alternately a sarcastic reaction to the idea of actually having a revolution , yet it also embraces the idea . " In Heavier Than Heaven , Charles R. Cross ' biography of Kurt Cobain , the author argues that the song is a reference to Cobain 's relationship with ex @-@ girlfriend Tobi Vail . Cross cites the line " She 's over @-@ bored and self @-@ assured " and states the song " could not have been about anyone else . " Cross backs up his argument with lyrics which were present in earlier drafts , such as " Who will be the King & Queen of the outcasted [sic] teens . "

Cobain has said , " The entire song is made up of contradictory ideas [. . .] It 's just making fun of the thought of having a revolution . But it 's a nice thought . " Drummer Dave Grohl has stated he does not believe the song has any message , and said , " Just seeing Kurt write the lyrics to a song five minutes before he first sings them , you just kind of find it a little bit hard to believe that the song has a lot to say about something . You need syllables to fill up this space or you need something

that rhymes . "

= = Music video = =

The music video for " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was the first for director Samuel Bayer . Bayer stated he believed he was hired because his test @-@ reel was so poor the band anticipated his production would be " punk " and " not corporate . " The video was based on the concept of a school concert which ends in anarchy and riot . Inspiration was taken from Jonathan Kaplan 's 1979 film , Over the Edge , as well as the Ramones ' film Rock ' n ' Roll High School . Filmed on a soundstage in Culver City , the video featured the band playing at a pep rally in a high school gym to an audience of apathetic students on bleachers , and cheerleaders wearing black dresses with the Circle @-@ A anarchist symbol . Occasionally , the scene would cut to a janitor (played by Tony De La Rosa) wearing a navy blue jumpsuit and dancing with a push broom handle . The video ends with the assembled students destroying the set and the band 's gear . The demolition of the set captured in the video 's conclusion was the result of genuine discontent . The extras that filled the bleachers had been forced to stay seated through numerous replays of the song for an entire afternoon of filming . Cobain convinced Bayer to allow the extras to mosh , and the set became a scene of chaos . " Once the kids came out dancing they just said ' fuck you , ' because they were so tired of this shit throughout the day , " Cobain said . Cobain disliked Bayer 's final edit and personally oversaw a re @-@ edit of the video that resulted in the version finally aired . One of Cobain 's major additions was the next @-@ to @-@ last shot of the video , which was a close @-@ up of his own face after it had been obscured for most of the video . Bayer noted that unlike subsequent artists he worked with , Cobain did not care about vanity , rather that " the video had something that was truly about what they were about . " The video had an estimated budget between \$ 30 @,@ 000 and \$ 50 @,@ 000 .

Like the song itself , the music video for " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was well received by critics . Rolling Stone writer David Fricke described the video as looking like " the greatest gig you could ever imagine . " In addition to a number one placing in the singles category , " Teen Spirit " also topped the music video category in the Village Voice 's 1991 " Pazz & Jop " poll . The video won Nirvana the Best New Artist and Best Alternative Group awards at the 1992 MTV Video Music Awards , and in 2000 the Guinness World Records named " Teen Spirit " the Most Played Video on MTV Europe . In subsequent years Amy Finnerty , formerly of MTV 's Programming department , claimed the video " changed the entire look of MTV " by giving them " a whole new generation to sell to . " Rolling Stone placed the music video for " Smells Like Teen Spirit " at number two on their 1993 list of " The 100 Top Music Videos " . MTV ranked the song 's music video at number three on its " 100 Greatest Music Videos Ever Made " list in 1999 . VH1 placed the debut of the " Teen Spirit " video at number eighteen on its 2000 list of " 100 Greatest Rock & Roll Moments on TV " , noting that " the video [ushered] in alternative rock as a commercial and pop culture force . " In 2001 , VH1 ranked the video fourth on its " 100 Greatest Videos " list . The video has been parodied at least twice : in " Weird Al " Yankovic 's music video for " Smells Like Nirvana " and in Bob Sinclar 's 2006 music video for " Rock This Party (Everybody Dance Now) " .

= = Live performances = =

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " was first performed live on April 17 , 1991 at the OK Hotel in Seattle , Washington . The performance is featured on the DVD of the 2004 box set With the Lights Out , while shorter clips are included on the Nevermind Classic Albums DVD , as well as the documentary film Hype ! As the song 's lyrics had not yet been entirely written , there are notable differences between it and the final version . For example , the first performance started with " Come out and play , make up the rules " instead of the eventual opening of " Load up on guns , bring your friends . " A recording of the earlier version appears on With the Lights Out and again on Sliver : The Best of the Box . A similar early live performance of the song is found in the documentary 1991 : The Year Punk Broke , filmed during a 1991 summer tour in Europe with Sonic Youth .

Nirvana often altered the song 's lyrics and tempo for live performances . Some live performances of the song had the line " our little group has always been " changed to " our little tribe has always been , " which can be heard on the 1996 live album *From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah* . Rolling Stone remarked that the *Wishkah* version of " Teen Spirit " " [found] Cobain 's guitar reeling outside the song 's melodic boundaries and sparking new life in that nearly played @-@ out hit . " A notable alternate performance of " Smells Like Teen Spirit " occurred on BBC 's *Top of the Pops* in 1991 , during which the band refused to mime to the pre @-@ recorded backing track and Cobain sang in a deliberately low voice and altered numerous lyrics in the song (for example , " Load up on guns , bring your friends " became " Load up on drugs , kill your friends ") . Cobain later said he was trying to sound like former Smiths frontman Morrissey . When *Top of the Pops* was cancelled in 2006 , The Observer listed Nirvana 's performance of " Smells Like Teen Spirit " as the third greatest in the show 's history . This performance can be found on the 1994 home video *Live ! Tonight ! Sold Out ! !* .

= = Cover versions = =

" Smells Like Teen Spirit " has been covered by numerous artists . One of the first cover recordings was an acoustic piano version by Tori Amos on her 1992 *Crucify EP* , which Cobain referred to as " a great breakfast cereal version " . The jazz trio The Bad Plus recorded the track for its CD *These Are the Vistas* , the Melvins recorded a version on *The Crybaby* featuring former child star Leif Garrett , and the industrial act Xorcist also released a tribute . The Moog Cookbook put out a synthesizer @-@ based cover version on *The Moog Cookbook* and the Japanese Beatboxer Dokaka has recorded a beatboxed cover version . British group The Flying Pickets released an a cappella version of the song on their album *The Original Flying Pickets : Volume 1* . Covers of the song on tribute albums include Blanks 77 on *Smells Like Bleach : A Punk Tribute to Nirvana* , and Beki Bondage on *Smells Like Nirvana* ; both released in 2000 . In 2005 , " Teen Spirit " was covered as a swing song by 1950s star Paul Anka . In 2006 , the band Flyleaf covered the song for Yahoo ! ' s LAUNCHcast service . In 2007 , Patti Smith included a cover version , which incorporated a piece of her poetry , on her album of cover songs *Twelve* . This was particularly a lyrical and melodic version of the song . A family @-@ friendly barbershop quartet version was performed by Beaker , Link Hogthrob , Rowlf the Dog , and Sam Eagle for the 2011 film *The Muppets* and its soundtrack . A version appears on J * DaVeY 's 2011 EP *Evil Christian Cop* . Robert Glasper Experiment covered the song on its Grammy @-@ Award winning *Black Radio* album .

In January 2015 , Daniel Johns performed an innovative live cover of the song at Triple J 's *Beat The Drum* birthday celebration .

The song has been adapted into other forms over the years . Germany 's Atari Teenage Riot sampled " Smells Like Teen Spirit " in the song " Atari Teenage Riot " from their 1997 album , *Burn , Berlin , Burn !* DJ Balloon , a German techno DJ , also used the sample in his song " Monstersound " . An instrumental cover version (slightly altered and named " Self High @-@ Five " to avoid legal complications) was produced by World Championship Wrestling as the entrance music for wrestler Diamond Dallas Page .

In addition to cover versions , " Smells Like Teen Spirit " has also inspired a few parodies . " Weird Al " Yankovic parodied the song in 1992 with " Smells Like Nirvana " , a song about Nirvana itself . Yankovic parodied the difficulty in understanding Cobain 's singing as well as the lyrics and their meaning . Yankovic has said Kurt Cobain told him he realized that Nirvana had " made it " when he heard the parody . In 1995 , the queercore band Pansy Division recorded a parody of the song called " Smells Like Queer Spirit " for its *Pile Up* album . Pansy Division guitarist Jon Ginoli insisted that his band 's version of the song was not a parody but " an affectionate tribute " .

= = Formats and track listing = =

= = Charts and certifications = =

= = Personnel = =

Kurt Cobain ? guitar , vocals

Krist Novoselic ? bass

Dave Grohl ? drums