



Univox Hi-Flyer Electric Guitar Fragment Smashed by Kurt Cobain, October 30, 1988

Date

c. 1974

Primary Maker

Mod Squad

Description

This circa 1974-77 Univox Hi-Flier Phase 3 broken electric guitar was played by Kurt Cobain of Nirvana in 1988 and was the first guitar that he demolished on stage. Kurt Cobain (1967-1994) was best known as the singer, guitarist and primary songwriter for Nirvana from their formation in 1987 to Cobain's death by suicide in 1994. Nirvana was one of the primary bands of the Grunge music scene, born out of the Pacific Northwest US in the early 1990s, and which led to the rise and prominence of Alternative Rock in the 1990s. Cobain became one of the most influential musicians of the 1990s and his legacy reverberates through popular music and culture even today. Nirvana played a Halloween-themed party with Lush and Lansdat Blister at dorm K208 on the Evergreen State College Campus in Olympia, Washington on October 30, 1988. Krist Novoselic rocked the bass shirtless, with fake blood dripping down his face and chest, while Chad Channing pounded the drums wearing a Germs (GI) album t-

shirt. At the end of the performance, Kurt Cobain, spattered with fake gore as well, smashed this Univox Hi-Flier to pieces – an archetypal move that would be repeated by the band countless times during the next half decade. Fan and friend of the band Ben Lattin was there to witness Nirvana's set and destructive aftermath. He wrote a letter to his sister describing the show and a fragment of the neck of the Hi-Flier that he grabbed: "3:30 AM. Dana, Here is a piece of Kurt's guitar. He smashed it as a 'Grand Finale'. If you think they played good Friday you should have seen them last night!!! Ryan [Aigner] and I played security guards to a bunch of drunk, slammin' punks. It was great! Tell you more later, Ben". Early on in Nirvana's career, Cobain gravitated toward Univox guitars, as they were inexpensive and lightweight, easy to play or throw around. The musician discussed his interest in the guitars to British journalist John Robb on July 14, 1989, the night after Nirvana played a show at Maxwell's in Hoboken, New Jersey: "I really like Univoxes, and that's what I play all the time. But they are hard to find because they are Mosrite copies that were made in the late '60s and the early '70s. You just have to find them by chance in pawn shops, and I'm just gonna keep breaking them every time I get one." The smashing of instruments created a feeling of climactic finality to their shows, but it also played with the idea of rock star cliché and excess, paralleling the primal destructive tactics of Jimi Hendrix or Pete Townshend. The key difference was that that Hendrix and the Who could afford to smash things, whereas Nirvana were broke at the time. The destruction of their instruments wasn't a casual, throwaway gesture, but a vital, emotional component of the music.

Dimensions

Overall (Body): 13 3/16 x 19 3/16 in., 3.96 lb. (33.496 x 48.736 cm, 1.8 kg)