

Rolling Stone prodigy advocates New Journalism

By Douglas R. Weil

Maybe it's because he writes for *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Maybe it's because he writes for *Rolling Stone*, is only 19 years old and has written for it since he was 14.

Maybe it's just his writing style, but Cameron Crowe seems to be an interesting person.

In a long-distance telephone interview with the *Daily Nebraskan*, Crowe talked about being one of the youngest, if not the youngest, journalist writing for a national magazine.

Crowe began his career as a rock journalist at the San Diego *Door*, a newspaper that Crowe referred to as "the heaviest underground newspaper in the city".

While the *Door* was an underground newspaper, supposedly representing the anti-establishment, Crowe landed his job there through a typically establishment technique—"the connection."

"My sister was living with a girl whose boyfriend was the brother of the girl that was married to the art director of the paper," Crowe said, pausing to take a breath before continuing. "Through all these people I got invited to a staff meeting."

Unknown to his editors, Crowe was only 14 years old when he began writing record reviews for the *Door*.

"I didn't tell them how old I was," Crowe recalled.

"My sister was living with a girl whose boyfriend was the brother of the girl that was married to the art director of the paper. . ."

"They later found out through my sister, but by that time I had established myself as a good writer."

No salary

Eventually Crowe became disillusioned about not receiving a salary though he was writing a considerable number of reviews and interviews. The *Door* could not quite manage to break-even, he said.

Frustrated, Crowe wrote to *Creem* magazine in hopes of landing a job with the nationally circulated publication. *Creem*'s editors were impressed with Crowe's work at the *Door* and he subsequently became a *Creem* staff member.

After working at *Creem* for a short while, Crowe became acquainted with Ben Fong-Torres, an editor for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Fong-Torres and Crowe talked about music and journalism. Crowe mentioned that he would like to write for *Rolling Stone* and Fong-Torres encouraged him to submit an article.

Crowe did a story on Poco and Richie Furay. *Rolling Stone* like it, and Crowe became a writer for them at age 14.

How did nationally known music personalities react to doing interviews with a "kid" from *Rolling Stone*?

Refreshing

"They made me feel real comfortable," Crowe said. "I guess it's refreshing to have someone young doing interviews, someone who still enjoyed the music. I was into the music and a lot of the people that I wrote about didn't seem to care about my age. I guess I should thank them a whole lot," he said.

Dealing with personalities in the music business is different from dealing with personalities in other environments such as the business and political worlds, he said.

Unique business

The unique nature of the music business and a host of social factors have created a new form of journalism, has labeled by some as "New Journalism."

This New Journalism is not really as revolutionary as the term might suggest. Logically, the writing style is the

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most visible change. New Journalism is more literary and to a degree more complex in structure than the traditional press in America.

While the writing style is the most apparent difference, the tone and atmosphere in the New Journalism setting are the style's most important traits. New Journalism professes to emphasize informality, candor and depth, in short a tearing down of barriers that may hinder a forthright exchange between reporter and subject.

Informality essential

According to Crowe, informality is essential to interviewing, especially when interviewing music celebrities.

"Most of the time I don't even prepare questions, he said. "It's much better if you don't have things written out and if you're not sure what you want to ask."

"If you know what you want to get out of a person you'll invariably get that out of them. In that situation they'll realize what it is you want and they'll tell you just that. It's easier for them."

Crowe said he thinks interviewers are beginning to better understand the purpose of an interview.

"Nowadays when anyone consents to an interview, especially a *Rolling Stone* interview, I think they realize they aren't going to be able to get away with reshaped publicity release material," he said. "They had better be a little forthcoming."

As an example of this frankness, Crowe mentioned the controversial interview in which Betty Ford told a national newsman that she would not be shocked if Susan told her she was engaging in premarital sex.

"In the past, those things were not asked," Crowe said. "Today people are expected to answer those questions. I think you could say that New Journalism has influenced this whole mood of candor."

Sometimes the openness and informality is so direct that it even surprises Crowe, he said, although he has been working with it for nearly five years.

Ronstadt interview

Crowe said he was taken back by the candidness of singer Linda Ronstadt in an interview that he did for a recent issue. He explained that although he knew Ronstadt only casually, she bared her soul to him, talking about all her problems and even some of her experiences with psychoanalysis.

"Sometimes it's almost embarrassing," Crowe said.

Crowe said he thinks *Rolling Stone* is more likely to get the complete story from someone than does the traditional press, he explained.

"*Rolling Stone* has the space to write about what is really going on without having to condense it into a compromising story. In the end, I think people are happy that there is space available in *Rolling Stone* so that the whole story can be written."

New Journalism is the norm for interviewing music personalities. People in the music business are used to its frankness, depth and informality. But what about celebrities from other fields that come into contact with this new journalistic form?

has grown to be," Crowe said. "As a music magazine, its coverage has become 'real slick.'"

"I'm real close to *Rolling Stone* so it's hard for me to have an overview. In the end, I write for *Rolling Stone* but I also read *Rolling Stone*. I've read it for a long time."

As for the tales about editor Wenner, Crowe hedges a bit. "Maybe the stories are true, maybe they aren't."

"I'd like to say (Rolling Stone Editor) Jann Wenner is a saint. I'm sure he's not. . ."

"Think about it, how many publishers and editors-in-chief have been really closely scrutinized? I think an editor understands the frenzy that comes with putting out a magazine of a hundred-odd pages every two weeks."

"I'd like to say Jann Wenner is a saint, I'm sure he's not. Personally I get along with Jann very well. He sent me a Christmas card and signed it 'Uncle Jann.'"

Crowe said he realizes he cannot remain at *Rolling Stone* forever. He looks for even better things in the future.

"I'd really like to get into writing screenplays," Crowe said. "I guess a lot of people say that like a lot of people say, 'I play guitar—a little bit.' Everyone has a screenplay they want to do."

Most of all, Crowe said he hopes his life and career do not become routine.

Or as Crowe said, "I don't want to be interviewing the Grateful Dead when I'm 40 years old."

arts and entertainment



Credit Cameron Crowe

Cameron Crowe has been writing for *Rolling Stone* magazine since he was 14 years old.

What about politicians? Politicians are extremely guarded in what they say and they are especially sensitive about how they appear in print.

Although most of Crowe's reporting experiences have involved music celebrities, he has had contact with politicians in a New Journalism setting.

"I spent a lot of time with (Indiana Sen.) Birch Bayh recently," Crowe said. "He was very open to that kind of interview. He said 'fuck'. He was very relaxed."

Magazine criticized

Although *Rolling Stone* is one of the leading proponents of New Journalism, the magazine recently has been the subject of considerable criticism. Some have charged that it has become elitist and corporate. One national magazine did a two-issue feature story portraying *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner as a temperamental tyrant, a 1970's Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde.

Crowe said he views *Rolling Stone* as the mirror-image of the music world as it is today.

"I think *Rolling Stone* has grown to be what the music

Classical guitarist performs Sunday

Classical guitarist Javier Calderon will perform in the Nebraska Union Ballroom Sunday at 8 p.m.

A native of Bolivia, Calderon was recommended to the North Carolina School of Arts, where he studied and taught, by the famed guitarist Segovia. He also studied with Segovia at Segovia's home in Spain.

Calderon has soloed with the Cincinnati Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra. He has performed solo recitals in the United States, Europe, South America, and Canada.

Gary Gilger of the Union Program Council said he hopes to persuade Calderon to teach a workshop when he is in Lincoln, Saturday through Monday.

Tickets, \$1.50 for UNL students and \$2.50 for the general public, are available at the Union South Desk and Dirt Cheap.