

## **“U2: There are fans and then there are superfans”**

**by Bent Gringer**

<https://pov.international/u2-superfans-hvad-sker-der>

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MUSIC // LONGREAD - There are maybe 300 international U2 superfans traveling around the band for more or even many of the concerts when U2 is touring. The ones who are at the top of the stage or fence every time, as close to the band as you can get. The so-called 'rail-junkies'. How can this be possible and what on earth are they doing?

I first met North Bowman in the lounge café at the Michelberger Hotel in Berlin.

It's July 2017, and it's the day after the U2 concert in town. He mocks the text on my T-shirt and recognizes a U2 fan: Unos // dos // tres // catorce // is the introduction to the number Vertigo. Directly translated it means one, two, three, fourteen, and it testifies to Bono's very lenient relationship with the Spanish language or the exact opposite.

U2 fans from all over the world are searching for and discussing [the deeper meaning](#) with just that counting sequence. Is it a message to the soundman, is it a religious reference, is Bono a mathematical genius, or were the band members just drunk?

The band did not run live photos and close-ups of the musicians during the concert on the big screen. In other words, I could only hear and see nothing of significance

Bowman, who is from Hamburg, is tall and very up and running, super happy and hectic, that is just before he hugs me, and he quickly says a lot in German and English: If you went to the concert, it was not fantastic, they are not great, U2 just isn't the best band in the world, did you notice when Adam... etc...

I'm a little more restrained and cool - after all, I've traveled to Berlin to hear U2 re-enact their 30-year-old Joshua Tree record and have probably heard the band at least seven times, and what does a young man like Bowman know about U2?

I'm also a little sour. I had bought and got a seat in the middle of the concert at the mighty and mighty oval Olympia stadium - just to find that U2 plugs against all traditions this time played on a traditional stage at the pointed (and opposite) end of the oval, and that I could hardly sit further away from the stage than I did.

In addition, the band - presumably true to the original stage layout - did not run live photos and close-ups of the musicians during the concert on the big screen. In other words, I could only hear and see nothing of significance.

I ask him if he has never heard U2 before? Yes, he says, this was my concert number 40... Forty! I'm shocked

Bowman doesn't really care, he's obviously had an almost religious out-of-body experience, and I ask him if he has never heard U2 before? Yes, he says, this was my number 40 concert.

Forty! I'm shocked. I tip Bowman to be in his 30s and do a quick math. So often U2 is not on tour, so he must have heard 4-5-10 concerts on each tour for the last 15 years. I lay down flat and try to make sense of the U2 fan craziness.

It is also the project of this article.

After 10 minutes, we are two U2 fans talking together, though one is undeniably speaking more and much more insightful than the other. Then Bowman suddenly stops and looks at me with a special look. Something big is on the way: Do you know what I got for the concert? No, I say.

He does not say anything. But with a significant mine, he takes a folded A4 sheet out of the inner pocket and folds it out - very carefully. That's the set list from tonight's concert he got from one of the roadies.

I understand at the same moment that it is appropriate to be extremely impressed with this relic, and I treat it with such caution and respect that Bowman lights me up with the words: You must take a picture of the list. And that, I feel, is an offer that I should not say no to.

Bowman is not alone in the world.

He is one of the perhaps 300 international U2 superfans who travel around the band for several or even many of the concerts when U2 is touring. The ones who are at the top of the stage or fence every time, as close to the band as you can get. The so-called rail junkies. How can this be possible and what on earth are they doing?

Henrik - a dedicated Danish fan

Henrik lives in Thisted, he is 50 years old and works with IT. And he is heading to Singapore where U2 plays in late November 2019.

No, he's not going to work, he's just going to two U2 concerts. Well enough with his son, who has lived in the city for ½ years, but who has come home and who would rather hear U2 in Korea - but here the concerts were poor compared to the exams at CBS. Therefore Singapore.

Henrik tells:

I jumped on U2 at a backpacker hostel in Australia in 1989 when I heard "Desire " from Rattle And Hum. I was about 20 years old and thought it was great. I lived in Varde and I never got to hear them in Gentofte, Parken or Forum in 1993, 1997 and 2001, but in 2005 it should be. And me and two friends thought it would be great to fill a bus with fans from Jutland and drive to a concert in Copenhagen.

International U2 fans know each other - at least the most tenacious. There is a very strong infrastructure in the international fan community made up of official and unofficial websites and Facebook groups

We were in line as number 4 and 5 when Fona opened the ticket sales and you could buy 6 tickets per ticket. main. By aligning with them before and after the queue, we managed to scrape 55 tickets together in various locations in the Park. That's the way it is with me, when I'm passionate about something, it's just 0 or 1, and then we do.

The day comes, got off on the bus to the Park, and there we did not know anything about the queue systems for the U2 concerts, but some fans had come before us. We made a small profit on the event and that allowed me and my friend to go to the U2 concert in Paris. Since then I have heard U2 in Horsens, Sweden, Germany where it now fit, Denver Colorado, Dublin and Amsterdam and Copenhagen of course - the two concerts in Singapore are my number 14 and 15. But I know until several who have been to over 100 U2 concerts.

How to get ticket for the pitches?

International U2 fans know each other - at least the most tenacious. There is a very strong infrastructure in the international fan community made up of official and unofficial websites and Facebook groups, and once you have been away a few times you start to know the others in line in real life. Not the queue in front of Fona in Varde, but the queue in front of the venue, where the international superfans often show up with supplies, bases and sleeping bags 1, 2 or many days before the concert.

It's all about being ready and only when the venue opens the entrances so you can get in first and get the coveted rail spots and preferably your favorite spot , always to the left or right of Bono, either The Edge side or Adam side.

Both Bowman and Henrik like Adam side, ie. right side of the stage between lead singer Bono and bassist Adam Clayton. Bono you can't really get in touch with during the concert, says Henrik, but Adam is fat and he also just has to pull in the 4 strings, so he has plenty of time to blink to the nearest.

Of course, people with numbered seating should not show up earlier. The queue is for people with tickets to the stands - the so-called GA tickets - General Admission.

If you don't have one, you might have a good reason (for example, that you can't get up for hours, that you are too small to see anything on the floor, that you want to be able to see all the visuals of the show , or that you are just more comfortable with everything in the seats.). There is also the possibility that one is not dedicated enough as a fan.

In the case of U2, the queue is not just 'first come first serve', where the person who first shows up with his sleeping bag and lies there the longest is allowed to enter the sale first. There are a great number of unwritten rules

I really like U2's music, but I'm clearly not dedicated enough as a fan. When rumors start of a U2 tour, I check to see if I am still a member of [U2's fanclub on U2.com](http://U2's%20fanclub%20on%20U2.com) .

It costs \$ 40 a year and gives a membership gift, discount on merchandise AND not least access to a pre-sale where you can buy 2 tickets for a concert of your choice at the time of your ticket sales. But one is not guaranteed tickets and not at all for the coveted pitches.

And if you've been a member before the tours are announced, you have access to a pre-pre-sale, and maybe even a pre-pre-pre-sale if you've been a member long enough.

I have not. With 8 tours in Denmark since 1982, there are an average of 4-5 years between each visit, and I often forget to renew the membership in the years after a tour. So the pitches are often sold out when I get through.

Bowman does not forget to renew his membership. So he - and all other dedicated superfans - obviously has access to the earliest category of pre-sales. But that's not the secret. Bowman can ALWAYS get General Admission tickets - even for a sold out concert a few days before it is played.

After many years in the queue, of course, he knows a number of other superfans who often buy more tickets than they need to use and then help their friends who have not been given a ticket. And if they don't have any tickets themselves, they know someone who has.

Like Henrik, who could not go to Dublin in November 2018, and then sold his two U2 tickets to another fan - of course at the printed price and not a dime anymore. As Henrik says: That's the cool thing about this fan community. When you buy a ticket, it's for Face Value. No one is peeing next door.

And so Bowman knows ALL the right Facebook groups and websites for international U2 fans - see for example. The Facebook group "[U2 fans tour group \(helping fans to get tickets\)](#)", which in its own statement is the original U2 Fans Tour Ticket Exchange Group with currently. about 9,300 members. Many tickets are offered here, including for other sold out concerts on U2's ongoing tour to New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and India.

If you are fan enough, you are prepared enough.

### **Collaboration with Royal Arena**

Henrik has an idea for a happening in connection with the first U2 concert in Copenhagen in November 2018 and agrees with another fan - Connie - that they, together with four others, organize the queue for U2's two concerts at Royal Arena Copenhagen in November 2018. They has got to know each other in the Danish U2 fan environment, who maintains contact through the [Facebook group Bono.dk](#) , where there are currently 441 members.

Here you share news about the band, upload video clips and concert recordings, sell excess U2 items and memorabilia, help with tickets and the kind that maintains a community.

And if you are Henrik, you soberly and regularly inform that there are now only xx days for you to go to Singapore and hear U2 the whole 2 times. You must boast and arouse envy, it just emphasizes the common passion.

Of course, a queue is the civilized alternative to pure anarchy and the right of the strong. But in the case of U2, the queue is not just first come first serve, where the person who first shows up with his sleeping bag and lies there the longest will be allowed to enter the sale first. There are a host of unwritten rules that someone has even written down. But that doesn't mean everyone agrees with the rules. Or in who has the right to enforce them.

The queue system is 'fan joint', ie. is controlled by fans. U2 and their management do not control how the queue is set up and managed. But you cooperate and you want to see that it is controlled

First and foremost, it is important that the queuing system is a fan joint, ie. is controlled by fans. U2 and their management do not control how the queue is set up and managed. But you cooperate and see to it that there is control so no one gets hurt when the band arrives at the venue or when the doors are opened to the audience.

Next, it is important how the venue in general and the security manager at the site specifically assess the conditions surrounding each concert. Here the frame for the fan-controlled queuing system is set. There are basically two options:

In the old days it was common to queue and spend the night or even camp in front of the venues, and in some cities and countries you still have to, and the system is simpler:

Come the day or a few days before, do the hard time = hold your seat in the queue, talk to your neighbors in the queue and talk to them about whether it's cool enough to be able to leave the queue for half or an hour if you have to pick up food or pee - and try to survive on the concrete with your new friends and keep your temper until you get locked in to the stadium as the first.

But in Europe and North America and on the ongoing tour in Asia, the main rule is that you should not spend the night at the venues, and in some cities you are even threatened with arrest and fines if you try anyway. Here you use a different queue system, the so-called check-in system.

Connie, who lives in Copenhagen and at that time has been to 28 U2 concerts, therefore contact the person responsible for all security in the Royal Arena and Live Nation, who runs the arena and, by the way, book most big names.

The security manager is named Henning Jølnæs, and he quickly explains that Royal Arena is not interested in U2 fans camping in front of Royal Arena in the days leading up to the concert. It is a matter of garbage and security. On several plans.

Henning Jølnæs says: I would rather not have you queue for several days, because then you get nothing to eat, you do not get anything to drink, you get cold, and when we then get the guests in, they become ill and unable to cope with the concert. I also don't want 500 fans trampling on when we open the entrances, because this is where accidents happen. So I'd rather have an organized queue of check-ins and the like.

And here we respect the queue system that our guests make themselves. So when a boyband concert arrives some girls in the morning and get in line, we say you can write a number on your hand in the first 200 and make sure you are in the queue and it respects we saw, and let them come in first and in that order.

Joe started writing what he saw: How to get in, when to arrive, what's a good queue, how to organize it, and how to survive in it

U2 is not a boy band, and U2 fans are not very ordinary, says Henning Jølnæs.

They are older, they are well organized, and they have chosen to be incredibly dedicated. The same goes for Bruce Springsteen fans. There are established fan clubs in Denmark and they are easier to collaborate with.

### **The new age queuing system**

The collaboration between organized U2 fans and venues about the queuing system is described in the 20-page manual [GA Joe's Guide to the U2 General Admission Queue](#), written by GA Joe with the bourgeois name Joe Ahorro based on his own experience as a longtime U2 superfan and line leader, ie queue organizer.

It was in connection with a U2 tour in 2009 (also called The 360° tour, which did not arrive in Copenhagen, but still reached Horsens), that Joe began to write what he saw and how it could work in different ways in different cities: How to get in, when to arrive, what is a good queue, how to organize it, and how to survive in it. To organize the fans to make it easier to transition to the show day.

What status does the GA Guide have? In a [podcast](#) made by two Dutch superfans in connection with the current tour in Australia, GA Joe says:

These are not rules , they are norms and customs - a kind of expectations. My guide is not a rule book. No one is enforcing it, it's a self-policing kind of thing. But for the past ten years, the guide has been used as a reference and organizer manual by line leaders all over the world.

I meet Steve Elliott, who is from the US, in line for one of the U2 concerts in Hamburg in October 2018.

He says: I've been a line leader and I've helped other line leaders many times. To be a line leader is a lot of work. People bitch! You have to organize other volunteers so you can stay overnight and maintain presence. You have to work with venue security, and you have to work with U2 management and security, set up the number system and manage the line. Did I mention that people bitch? And you end up being sleep deprived when the show finally starts.

Anyone can start a line, says GA Joe, and in Copenhagen it's Connie.

She says: We talked about it in our small group of U2 fans in Denmark. We wanted to be good hosts and ensure that both the local and traveling U2 fans - and ourselves - had a good and safe experience. I live in Copenhagen, so it was quite practical that it was me who met with the Royal Arena.

Connie has an agreement with 5-6 others in the Danish U2 fan community that together they will make sure that there is daily staffing at the Royal Arena until the concert day itself

Connie has been to a lot of concerts on U2's last 3 tours, and she knows well what the line leader's job is all about. She and Henning Jølnæs have long ago made an agreement to use the check-in system. The concerts in Copenhagen are played on Saturday and Sunday, September 29 and 30, 2018, and Connie runs out on Wednesday afternoon and starts the queue 3 days before the first concert, where no one has yet appeared. But it came quickly.

Connie has an agreement with 5-6 others in the Danish U2 fan community that together they will make sure that there is daily staffing at the Royal Arena until the concert day itself. It takes about 20 guards to secure queue and number delivery, and anyone who comes after a number is therefore asked if they will take guards.

If they answer yes, they will receive one of the first 20 numbers reserved for those who help organize the queue. And otherwise they just get the number that is now reached. Many answer yes and take a cue as queue guards / number distributors.

On Wednesday evening, Connie posted a message in the Facebook group Bono.dk and in the international U2-Facebook groups, including U2 GA Information, which is the unofficial source of where, how, when and who organizes the queue.

She explains how it's going to take place: If you want to get into the GA area and want to secure a good seat, you have to show up and get a number and be written up in a book.

And then you can leave the area and come back at some special check-in times if you want to keep your number in line.

On the day of the concert, Royal Arena hands out bracelets for the first 500 numbers, and then they just have to be back at 16, where everyone with bracelets will be locked into barriers in the order they have bracelets. Royal Arena stands for this and helps us to check that no one is cheating and that no chaos is occurring. The doors open at 1 p.m. 18, and they have promised to escort people with bracelets in so no one starts running and other unodes.

In some places you have no appointments and first come into dialogue with venue security on the actual concert day

As Henning Jølnæs says: If people start running, we pill them out. And then they get in the back of the queue. It is good for us that they know. U2 fans are grown-ups. They keep appointments and go nicely into two rows.

Henning Jølnæs makes sure that an email about the procedures is sent out to everyone who has bought a ticket. It is quite unusual and an expression of the fine collaboration with Royal Arena / Live Nation, and many fans acknowledge the good way to organize it all.

This is not the case everywhere, Some places have no appointments and come first in dialogue with venue security on the concert day itself. A fan writes in the thread during the [post](#) : Great that you got a collaboration with LiveNation and the arena - not everyone can do it!

On Friday night before the first concert, there are 250 fans who have passed by and got a number, and a few more will arrive in the morning before the Royal Arena starts putting bracelets with numbers on people.

### **People Bitch**

I wonder how to find out who organizes the queue? What if there is someone on the opposite side of the Royal Arena who also has a book with some names in it? And how does Royal Arena know who to partner with?

In Denmark this is not a big problem. The Danish fan club gathers around the Facebook group Bono.dk, here you do not keep anyone out, and in the FB group communication about concerts, pre- and post-parties and the queue system is quite open. Henning Jølnæs can thus quickly see if people have legitimacy:

The good thing for us is to get in touch with some people who have contacts further out in the fan communities and who can help us to run the events properly and without the chaos that you see in other countries. Many fans will kill to come in and stand in front. But we want everyone to come in and be alive and have a good experience.

Not all international U2 superfans accept the Danish way of organizing the queue

Connie tells:

We communicated in English in all international Facebook groups with exactly the same information as in Bono.dk. No difference was made, so the travelers had equal opportunities to find out what was going on. Live Nation also wrote both Danish and English to ticket buyers.

But not all international U2 superfans accept the Danish way of organizing the queue.

Entering the scene on Saturday, Melissa steps out of Venezuela, now a resident of the United States, and she is pissed. She has been a traveling fan for many years and had definitely expected her to start the queue in Copenhagen for concert 2 on Sunday, because she had done that in some of the other cities on the trip before Copenhagen. Getting number 17 on your hand with booze is just not very cool when you are used to giving yourself number 1 and standing with the book and the half kingdom.

Not that it has any great practical significance, because on the Experience + Innocence Tour, as it was called in 2018, the stage structure was such that there were 200 meters of railings and thus room for at least 400 in the front row.

But there is quite a bit of prestige associated with having the number one and the lowest numbers. It is in itself an attractive feather in the hat and a trophy for the collection.

Melissa is furious and challenges the legitimacy and thus the authority, and then the turmoil spreads. Capital letters are spoken

Some international superfans have the habit of going 3 tracks before concert 1 ends to be able to start or be in line for concert 2.

The Danish fans around Bono.dk think it is a profoundly good nightmare, where the hunt for the low numbers and thus the front seats in the queue overshadows what it is all about, namely the music.

So an agreement has been made with Henning Jølnæs for the Danish fans to start the queue for concert 2, but only half an hour after concert 1 is over.

Melissa is furious and challenges the legitimacy and thus the authority, and then the turmoil spreads. Big letters are spoken, and Henrik and Connie are a bit excited about whether Melissa can mobilize some of her now good connections in U2 security to override the agreements made with the Royal Arena.

She can't. However, a lot of international fans skip the last numbers, but it will be as Connie and Henning Jølnæs have agreed. And Melissa ends up complimenting Connie on the good organization in Denmark.

Henrik does not believe that he completely reached 100 per cent. good friends with Melissa and hope not to meet her in line in Singapore. But he does, because she organizes the queue for Concert 2 in Singapore, and there are no sour mines.

And she is good: Melissa can do some things, there is NO sling in the roller, I can promise you, she must have. When we had to do a hard line-up on Saturday morning, we were in line and 147 and 149 were there, but 148 were missing. Has anyone seen number 148? No it wasn't right and then swish he was deleted from the list, gone. Some whispered that she was "a goddam bitch". But that's how the deal was, and it's good enough that it can be controlled, says Henrik.

New Zealand, Australia and Asia, November 2019

The ongoing tour starts in Auckland, New Zealand in November 2019. Here's where things go wrong:

International fans start the queue 5 days before the concerts with the check-in system. The locals don't like it. In the media, you can read angry statements from local fans

30 international superfans have arrived early with the band, who spend the days before the concert rehearsing. International fans start the queue 5 days before the concerts with the check-in system. The locals don't like it. In the [media](#) you can read angry statements from local fans:

No-one, and I mean no-one ever does this for any show here in Australia or New Zealand... you roll up on the morning of the show and queue up and stay there every day (Apart from toilet / food runs)

And another writes:

What is upsetting to NZ / AU fans is that international fans are dictating who gets on the rail, how about you multi-tour fans taking a back seat for a change and letting us Kiwi / AU fans get on the rail. We have had to wait nine years for this tour back to NZ. This is just seems mean-spirited by international fans with no respect for local fans at all.

And in the commentary for the article, it takes a turn for the worse with calls for physically handy circumvention of the queue. But three days before the concerts, U2's security team and concert organizer made an agreement to respect the number queue set by international fans. It helps on the cases that there is plenty of room and that locals can still get numbers on the concert day itself.

Later, it helps on the case that goat went all over with chaos and long queues, as all the other guests were going in. Then the focus in the media was that the local concert organizer had not grown up with his task as big an international name as U2.

In Singapore a little later this month, Henrik is in doubt. Nobody knows if a queue is being arranged as Henrik leaves Denmark.

He and the son have to take a look at the National Stadium Kallang as they come to Singapore. And there is nothing to see. Suddenly on Wednesday evening a message pops up on Facebook - a Frenchman starts the queue and numbering system.

But no one knows if the organizers will respect the numbering system, and it is hotly debated in the comments, whether it is possible, whether it is legal and whether it is smart.

Mathias and I take turns going out, and we always make arrangements with those closest to them to look for our seats when we do

Henrik and son return to the stadium on Wednesday night and get numbers 32 and 33. There are check-ins tomorrow and evening the next days. Some French fans organize the queue, but they are not so good at English, so they get the help of a traveling superfan Vikram, who Henrik knows from before.

It was not until Friday afternoon that an agreement was made between Kallang Stadium Security and U2 management.

On Saturday morning, the fan flock meets at 7am and is sent away until 9.30. But then there will be both bracelets and a message that the numbering system will be respected and that fans with numbered bracelets will be the first to access through a special booth if they are back at 16 Pyha!

Henrik and his son get their rail spots and the advantages that come with it: You look good, you can take great pictures, and you can lean and rest up the fence.

But there are also disadvantages: don't always leave her room to go to the bathroom and buy drinks. The covered stadium is pounding hot and humid, and after 5 minutes Henrik and son are soaking wet. But that's all, and the two Danes make appointments with those closest to them when they go out to pee and get beer.

Henrik explains: Mathias and I take turns going out, and we always make arrangements with those closest to them to look for our seats when we do. And I make great efforts to go back the same way I went out so people may know me and not think I'm cheating. No one is cheating, and if someone suddenly comes from behind who thinks they can just stand in front of us, they are told to move.

Lasting Memories

Being a fan is very much about queuing, organizing it or finding the ones that do. About finding out how it all works and what to do to secure a good seat for the concert. There is an adrenaline rush associated with getting up front, being close to your favorite band and demonstrating - not least to yourself - that you are a "skilled " fan.

And the concert experience is usually infinitely many times stronger when you can almost reach out and touch the band. Gods - and yet so human when you are so close.

But the queue is also a practice in itself - ie. something people do together - which is disappearing because security tightening after terror and tragedy makes it harder to use the camping model.

We are all U2 fans and it does not matter what you do in your daily life, whether you are a garbage man, journalist, lawyer or shop assistant. Touring and concerts are a recreation area from one's ordinary life at home

In the podcast [Talking U2 General Admission with GA Joe, GA Joe](#) says he misses the camping days but that his body does not. Simply because of the community, meeting and checking up on old friends, meeting new people and sharing something about what you have in common, namely U2 and experiences with the band and music, what shows to watch, etc. It's not about , what people are doing in their daily lives, and in that way the queue in its own way is quite egalitarian.

Connie says: We are all U2 fans and it does not matter what you do in your daily life, whether you are a garbage man, a journalist, a lawyer or a shop assistant. Touring and concerts are a break from one's ordinary life at home, so most would rather talk about why they are there and the common interest in U2.

The meeting with the other fans in the queue is also an opportunity to talk about the music that fills so much in one's life, but which one's friends and family at home do not really understand or bother to listen to.

In the GA Guide, Joe says:

I can seriously look back on all my experiences in the queue - good and bad - and remember how much fun it was to meet everyone, listen in on the sound checks, feel the rush of getting into the venue early, enjoy the concert with the Same fans I shared the queue with during the entire day, and getting various setlists at the end of the night.

I vividly recall meeting new friends, sharing our love for U2's music, talking about our backgrounds, and explaining where our travels have taken us. In the end, the U2 queue is more than trying to make it to the front; it really is a place where different people of varying backgrounds can find common ground, with the hope of having long lasting memories.

As Henrik finds out that U2 is coming to Copenhagen in September 2018, the idea arises to create an event that can be a loading memory for many fans and not least for the band: Henrik decides to make a typhoon.

You know them from football and other sports events. In [Wikipedia](#) you can read the following:

Tifo is a simplification of the Italian word tifosi, which means passionate supporters or fans... Today, tifo is mostly used to describe spectacular choreography performed by fans in the stands in connection with a sporting event, most often a football match.

Typhoons are primarily organized by an ultras group or fan club to show their affiliation and love for their club...

The typhoon must be two huge flags - one Danish on one side and one Irish on the other side of the Arena. Henrik knows Henning Jølnæs from previous U2 concerts in Horsens, and he is completely on the idea, as he will be contacted several months before the concerts. And then planning and security goes into it.

Henrik notes everything on a floor plan and finds that 10,000 pieces of colored paper are needed. Paper samples are sent to Henning, who is in contact with the fire authorities, because of course, security is involved when 10,000 pieces of paper lie and flow and there is something about cleaning.

If they get infected when they get wet, you can slip in them, who picks up, etc. And Henning asks U2 management what Royal Arena really has to say yes to:

Adam said afterwards that it had been absolutely crazy fat. When I get such a crazy idea, just give it a try. And it always seems impossible until done

Usually there are no fans in the hall before the concerts, where things are built up, so we had a longer period where we had to find out what could be done.

We sometimes met out here, and I quickly got support from U2's organization that what I did with the Danish U2 fan club was what we went with. Both the queue and the typhoon. It should be no secret that all of us were interested in success and success.

We were all really happy when the typhoon was wound up and it all played out. We have not experienced this before. U2 is a great band, and the artists and guests need to have a good time.

But it actually means something to me, too, when we have people who are so dedicated that they also think it's cool. So we help them in every way we can - us Springsteen fans - and we get great praise for it.

Henrik organizes about 50 volunteers (so-called typho officers) who can signal at the right time, instruct people and pick up paper, and four weeks before the concerts he comes in contact with Jennifer from U2 management.

She wants to know if the band needs to know something or whether it should be a surprise? Surprise of course!

Henrik is quite passionate and believes that many of the most dedicated U2 fans are some weird nerds - said in all love, because he is one of them himself

Henrik explains: Both Henning and Jennifer gave us fantastic support. Up in the U2 organization - right up to the level just below the band - people think it was a cool idea.

And when we did the typhoon, the band members looked at each other and it was clear that they were thinking "what the fuck" and [Bono commented on](#) the scene.

And Adam said afterwards that it had been absolutely crazy fat. When I get such a crazy idea, just give it a try. And it always seems impossible until done. But it could only turn into something because of a number of good people around me who succeeded.

## Strange nerds

Henrik is quite passionate and believes that many of the most dedicated U2 fans are some strange nerds - said in all love, because he is one of them himself. But he is not the only one who goes to great lengths to secure loading memories with U2.

Mark Baker is a Toronto school teacher, age 43, well married and with children. He has been a U2 superfan under the name U2 BROTHR for many years and in 2009 became very busy, almost obsessed with the idea of becoming one of the fans that Bono pulls up on stage and dances with. In a 2015 [interview at the Toronto Sun](#) , it states:

"To be honest, I'm usually the only black man in the front row of a U2 concert. But to get more attention, I dress in this silver outfit with a disco ball helmet, so I'm kind of hard to miss," he said.

The number plate he wears around the neck for the concerts, where he is most often in the front row - in silver glitter costume and with disco ball helmet on his head

"I'll wait for the guys from U2 to come out before the show or at an event, so not only does the band recognize me, but so do the security guards and such."

In 2013, one of Mark Baker's friends makes a loving and critical [documentary](#) that portrays Mark Baker's life and longing as a U2 superfan.

Mark has all good intentions and many successful attempts to make himself noticed, among other things, with the license plate from his car, which has the text U2 BROTHR.

The number plate he wears around the neck for the concerts, where he is most often in the front row - in silver glitter costume and with disco ball helmet on his head. On several occasions, Marc succeeds in meeting bands and band members, but despite this, he does not show up on stage during the film.

The film - which is highly recommended to anyone who has reached this point in this article - thus ends with Mark's great disappointment and somewhat unreliable attempts to hold on to the joy of it all. But Mark is not actually giving up and in 2015 it is finally succeeding. And not only will [Mark be called to the stage](#) in Montreal in June, his entire [U2 copy band will join](#) and play Desire with the U2 on stage in Toronto in July.

Another man with a case is Cathal McCarron. Cathal is Irish and has been a U2 fan for most of his life - at least since 1983. On a long bus trip in 2008 in Indonesia, where he survives by hearing the entire U2's back catalog, he decides to write a book, [Me & U2](#) , about how his life has been influenced and enriched by U2 - by their music and everything around the music.

Later, he gets the brilliant idea of trying to finance his own participation in the 2009-2011 U2 360° Tour by producing and selling the book. The plan is to attend 89 concerts in Europe, North America, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and South America over the next 2 years.

A female fan in line says - under the promise of full discretion - that she may spend 100,000 a year on concerts and fan-related things, but so it's not just U2

Cathal is not very good at selling books, in fact he likes to give them away to other fans in line and at taverns. But he manages to complete the project and he sees the whole tour - and writes a new book about his experiences, where he ate and slept too little and too badly and drank too much.

And became an expert in the logistics of finding cheap flights and staying cheap. The book is called [Me & U2 360°](#) and is a long description of life as an international traveler U2 superfan. Cathal meets Melissa - a Venezuelan U2 fanatic - who lives in Barcelona at the beginning of the book.

The book is a first-hand account of everything the GA Guide picks up. And not least, the book describes the camping tradition that is disappearing from the U2 cows all over the world. But as 2009 is standard - with 2-3 days of camping in front of the stadium for hardcore fans in Europe - and up to 6-8 days in South America! And that GA Joe - but not his body - misses.

How can U2 get superfans advice to travel around the world?

When I meet Bowman in Berlin in the fall of 2017, one of my first thoughts is: How on earth can you afford to travel around the world after a rock band? And how do you have time for that?

In the book [Me & U2 360°](#) , Cathal McCarron writes:

As well as seeing lots of U2 concerts, self-funding travel was my goal. This notion - that I could pay my way to travel around the world by traveling around the world - was irresistible once I became aware of it.

Of course, one of the best things about being a schoolteacher in England is the thirteen-week holiday allowance.

So Cathal takes home the occasional concerts and fits his job as a schoolteacher when he has no vacation or can take time off.

Living off of travel while traveling is not going very well . But obviously it doesn't have to be that expensive to be a traveling superfan either.

I get the feeling that money is one of those things that you just don't really talk about in the egalitarian U2 fan environment - where someone might be more equal than some others

Bowman - whose name is Boris and turns out to be 41 years old - doesn't really like to talk about the finances behind the whole superfan life, and the same goes for some of the fans I meet in the queue in Copenhagen in 2018.

A female fan in the queue says - under the promise of full discretion - that she might spend 100,000 a year on concerts and fan-related things, but so it's not just U2.

She does not share the view that one can only be a true fan of one band. 100,000 is still a lot of money and you have to have them anyway, but she elaborates:

The 100,000 are for everything - that is also airplanes and stays. And for me, it has become the way I vacation. I live cheaply and do not have children and do not spend much money on myself in everyday life. But I realize that not all fans have the money, nor do I feel that I am in any way a better fan than them ...

I get the feeling that money is one of the things that one just doesn't really talk about in the egalitarian U2 fan environment - where someone might be more equal than some others. At least it should not be the financial ability that creates or determines one's status as a U2 superfan - although it helps, at least if you are a collector.

Bowman says: It doesn't have to be that expensive. First, I always only pay face value for the tickets, and sometimes I can get lucky and get a ticket from other fans who have an extra.

Secondly, it is not expensive to lie in a queue or take care of a number system, you eat most pizza, or you have a packed lunch and a six pack. If you are camping in the queue, you do not have overnight expenses, and sometimes you can crash with other U2 fans in the city where the concert is played. And sometimes you are on a night train or night flight and save an overnight that way. And then you get REALLY good at finding cheap transport.

### **Cheap transport**

I take up the subject again with Bowman when I meet him in Copenhagen a month ago - he is currently following another band Archive around Europe.

Bowman explains:

I am going to the Archive concert in Brussels on November 2 and have paid 1 euro for the air ticket from Hamburg to Brussels. Plus 29 euros in tax.

It is not expensive, after all. I am going to Madrid December 7, and a direct flight from Hamburg is expensive. But then I take a cheap flight to Barcelona and then drive 3 hours in a cheap train to Madrid. So it doesn't get expensive either.

Fans are different and have different terms, but if you are a super fan, it requires a strong priority - of your finances or of your time

Bowman has come to Copenhagen by train. He has bread and cheese and some beer. And then he lives in a 6-man living room at Danhostel for 285 kroner.

But what about the time, how can it be related? I don't go to Thailand for three weeks and vacation - this is my Thailand, he says.

Bowman reached U2 10 times on the tour in Europe in 2018, so now he has seen U2 52 times. But for now, he is between jobs. And among other things therefore he is not with U2 in Asia.

He has read some music science on and off and worked as a technician. at Der Spiegel, where he was dismissed in his time - with a large bag of money in his hand. And it did so possible to take the U2 360° tour to the USA.

Bowman lives cheaply and has no children. Henrik has. But as he travels a lot, he has 100,000 bonus points standing and they can cover the trip to Singapore for both him and his son.

In total, Henrik expects that the trip to Singapore, tickets for 2 concerts, local transport, food, hotel and all in 8 days can be managed for 10,000 kroner for both him and his son. Plus bonus points.

Other fans live on a rock outside and at home, some have good jobs and others are again well married.

Fans are different and have different terms, but if you are a super fan, it requires a strong priority - of your finances or of your time.

What distinguishes a superfan?

Uha, most fans say I ask in the queues, you can't answer that. Because we are very different. And at least it is not a competition as to who has been there most times.

Evidently there is a discussion in fan circles under the heading superfans, true fans or real fans. Does anyone have more "real " fans than others?

Connie says: Superfans are a strange concept. You may well be a huge U2 fan, even if you've never seen them live or only been to one or two concerts. It does not mean that you are less of a fan than those who travel around the world to see them.

It might just mean that you do not have the same financial opportunities as those who can go to 100 concerts, or that you have a job or family life that does not allow it.

There are certainly more in the international fan community who would like the status, attention and prestige that comes with being called a super fan because it indicates that they are more important or better than other fans and therefore more justified than others. fans. Eligible to manage the queue, are on the front row for the concert, get the set list, meet the band, etc.

Everyone I talk to says, as with a mouth, that you are not a more "real " fan because you can travel a lot and see many shows, or because you have a large collection of U2 albums and trophies.

It is also often seen in many blog posts and interviews, not least with some of them who travel a lot or have collected many U2 effects. But there is a good deal of prestige to it anyway.

Maybe your passion shows that you know a lot about the band or their music or both, or that you really like dancing to the music or something else

The most important thing is one's love for the music and dedication to the band. Maybe - as Connie says - you only have the advice or time to watch one concert, but you might as well be a fan of the music as The Traveling Railjunkies.

Maybe your passion shows that you know a lot about the band or their music or both, or that you really like dancing to the music or something else...

Some superfans spend a lot of time making websites, listings and podcasts and maintains chat forums or posts really much and good content about U2 on the web and the like. At the same time, they create and maintain the necessary infrastructure in the community , thus creating the basis for virtual-social life as a U2 fan outside the queues:

In 1995, Canadian Aaron Sams created the U2 fan website <https://www.u2songs.com/> , which is the oldest active fan website, though it has been through a number of incarnations over the years.

Here, with accurate references and lists, you can read all about the past, information about ongoing tours and rumors about the future.

[U2start.com](http://U2start.com) is another really good bet if you want to know something - or over time everything - about U2:

U2start.com was founded in July 2006, the site started out as a personal website for the founder of this website, member Remy. The goal was to create more of a personal website for the fan who wanted to find everything about U2 in one place. Due to the very limited availability of U2 bootlegs on the internet a catalog was developed where fans could explore and download U2 shows and audio recordings. U2start was created out of the things Remy missed as an U2 fan on the internet. U2start's mission is to become the ultimate fan site containing everything you want and didn't know you wanted as a U2 fan, all in a great community.

The Dutchman Remy is in New Zealand, Australia and Japan, and Henrik knows him very well. He's a really nice guy, says Henrik. No doubt Remy is a super fan - right now. he has seen 83 shows, as evidenced by his presentation on the website.

Other superfans gather on records or other U2 related effects. U2 BROTHR Mark Baker has a 'shrine' with U2 plates and memorabilia in his basement

The number of shows you have seen does not mean anything in fan circles. Still, most people usually talk about how many U2 shows they've seen. Including Remy, Bowman, Henrik and the undersigned. Why do we have it if it doesn't matter? And we usually know who's at the top of the pop - it's Englishman Martin "Bonofan" Ward, who [is said to have seen](#) 211 shows when this tour ends in Mumbai in mid-December 2019.

Other superfans gather on records or other U2 related effects. U2 BROTHR Mark Baker has a shrine with U2 plates and memorabilia in his basement.

I meet Canadian superfan Scott Holbech in the queue for Hamburg1 in 2018, and he talks about his collection, which is well over \$ 100,000. He knows this because the collection is insured. He mainly collects on vinyl records and is interested in the rare 1st releases, strange colors or misprints and the like.

And of course the record should be in good condition, and so should the album cover and inner sleeve - preferably near mint, ie. perfect. No scratches or corners, ball pen on the cover and sleeve and the like. It goes without saying that he has everything that is published. But not necessarily in the right pressing.

Yet, in a podcast [# 5 - From Auckland to Brisbane with a Longtime U2 Collector](#) , Scott points to another, the Italian super [collector](#) Marco Severini as the one to go to if you want to see a truly impressive collection. And you can actually see it in the Facebook group [U2 Seven-up Collector's Corner](#) - Marco especially collects on records and cassette tapes. Not everything is equally expensive. Many plates or tapes and miscellaneous items have no value outside of dedicated collectors' circles, and you may be lucky to pick up for little money - 2, 5 or \$ 10.

### **Trophies, collectors and scientists**

But fans collect so much: the number of shows you have seen, original setlists (or pictures of them, thank you Bowman), cool pictures and video clips that you have taken so close and then uploaded and got many likes, pickers, drumsticks , drinking cups, T-shirts, scarves, flags, pins and badges, selfies, recordings in the form of records, cassette tapes, CDs and DVDs, promotional materials of all kinds, unofficial concert recordings, movie and video clips, books, articles, pictures, interviews, posters, big inflatable yellow lemons and special editions of U2 iPods and much more - you name it, just there's some U2 or logo on it.

The Facebook group [U2 Collectormania](#) is for the U2 collectors. Here you can hang out and learn a whole lot about U2 collector items. Not everyone is expensive.

Trophies can also be good stories about the band that you have not experienced yourself, but that you have heard from someone. They can be swapped or just given away, and they rarely get worse off

After the typhoon in Copenhagen, Henrik received a small bag of bass strings and a U2 special mug. There are good things in collector circles. We are talking about a serious Börsen event with Bono in

Tivoli's Concert Hall in 2006, where Henrik was astonished at Bono's great knowledge of everything possible, and partly by getting his signature in a picture.

I was also at that event and mention to Henrik that after finishing, I grabbed half the glass of water that Bono had been drinking and a bit like a joke carried it home to my children's mother, who was and is a huge Bono fan.

Some fans gather at close-up experiences with the band or its individual members. Have you talked to Bono? - and it has some in the way, because he usually gives himself up after the sound tests to talk to superfans in the queue

She thought it was a bit clumsy and we threw it out. I understand today that it was a gigantic mistake. And Henrik then gets completely quiet at the other end of the telephone line. If Bono is actually Jesus, that water could probably be used for something good in a tight turn.

Trophies can be many things, and they are not always material:

Some fans gather at close-up experiences with the band or its individual members. Have you talked to Bono? - and that has a bit to do, as he usually gives himself up after the sound tests to talk to superfans in the queue.

How many times have you met him? Did you get a selfie with The Edge and his wife (you know, Morleigh Steinberg, who both paints the house AND swings the lasso in Corbijn's beautiful video for The Joshua Tree Tour)?

Have you scored a signature?

Or did you get a smile from drummer Larry Mullen? - Hardcore fans know that the last thing at least doesn't happen often.

Trophies can also be good stories about the band that you have not experienced yourself, but that you have heard from someone. They can be swapped or just given away, and they rarely get worse off.

Many - dedicated I suppose - fans get a U2 tattoo and others then collect pictures of these. This applies, for example. Beth Nabi, an assistant professor of Graphic Design and Digital Media at the University of North Florida, USA. She is a traveling fan herself and runs [The U2 Tattoo Project](#) , which is a real academic study and research project and at the same time an international curation of U2 fans' tattoos. You can see some of the tattoos in the [project's Facebook group](#) .

Beth Nabi is part of a growing crowd of scientists around the world who are interested in U2. You can read about them on the website [U2conference.com](#) . About The U2 Conference states:

The U2 Conference brings together fans, scholars, students, critics, artists, and authors to further our critical appreciation of the music, work and influence of U2 and U2 fandom. Our gatherings are as communal and experiential as they are educational.

You study fan culture, music, textual content, religious significance, the connection to hymns, visual identity and a wide range of other topics, and aim to create an overview of the latest contributions from U2 research. A quick count says there are currently 120 research grants in the bibliography.

And on the website you come across the concept of acafans. An acafani is an academic (academic) who is also a fan of the subject she is studying. Beth Nabi is an acafani, and scientists from around the world

have just held U2CON 2019, where Beth Nabi gave a presentation titled Only Love Can Leave Such A Mark: The Image and Experience of U2 Fan Tattoos.

The first part of the title is a line from the U2 number Magnificent. Currently, she has documented over 200 tattoos.

The U2 conference took place on November 21, 2019 in Sydney - where U2 gave 2 concerts on November 22 and 23. Good and do not track random timing on the part of the researchers. Beth Nabi was in the queue outside both days collecting new pictures of tattoos. Researching while in line is also a way to reduce travel costs. But unfortunately it is reserved for acafans with fixed work.

### **Rock and roll are drugs**

When I talk about my experiences with U2 superfans, some of my friends say it sounds like I've come into a teenage room full of autistic people. The obsession-like passion and dedication to the U2 case is not something they associate with adult schoolteachers, IT managers and researchers.

Bowman himself is on the autistic line, he thinks superfans are part of the usual. There is a lot of hardship and you have to be stubborn and focused. I myself am probably  $\frac{1}{4}$  Asperger's and a  $\frac{1}{8}$  something else.

So what can we really conclude about the U2 fan and superfan phenomenon? I haven't read the 120 research papers in The U2 Conference, but I'm glad they exist and are eagerly waiting for someone to send me the academic analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon.

There are many fans who get a rush - the adrenaline rush or sense of happiness of being at these concerts. So do I.

The phenomenon and concepts such as super fans or real fans and true fans are debated and many do not like the hierarchy and thus the differences in prestige and influence in the fan environments and the "closeness" to the band that the categories create.

But no one hides that there is a particularly international hardcore U2 fan community who consider themselves super fans or real fans - thus creating a dividing line for ordinary, regular fans as they sacrifice more, pay more and more often go to extremes in the cultivation of their passion.

Connie says: There are many fans who get a rush - adrenaline rush or the feeling of happiness of being at these concerts. So do I. The first time you stand on the front row and see them up close and see their facial expressions and how they react and interact with the audience is a really cool experience.

It is pure happiness. Once you try it, you can't just go back and sit down next time, well. Then you seek that feeling of happiness again. It's just like a drug.

And when you have traveled around and seen them 10-20 times in the first row, it's not good enough anymore, is it?

Then you want more. Then you want a drumstick, a set list and a picker. You will be on stage with the band and you will meet them and get your records signed, etc.

Many people are chasing that feeling of happiness and will always top the previous experience. It's an addiction.

We often talk about and laugh at how addictive U2 concerts are, and that we almost have "post-tour withdrawal", as if we were high on something. We have that too - high on music.

Sometimes I wish I could go back to my very first U2 concert, where I was grateful and grateful to just sit in some shit seat because I was in the stadium and U2 was playing. It is still one of my best concerts.

There was an innocence about it, and when you become such a so-called super fan, I think you reach a point where there is no longer enough. You want more, and it needs to get better, closer and more intimate for each and every time. And then it's more and more about the band and the fan prestige and your own ego than what you originally came for - the music. I never hope to get there.

So the feeling of happiness around U2 and all the experiences with the band is a drug that you can become addicted to. More wants more, and more is needed to achieve the same feeling of happiness as the first time. And the hunt and preparations for the hunt will fill more and more in one's life. A superfan is born. And like other drug addicts, superfans also feel that you have to go to extremes to get your fix.

What to do when the tour is over? Preparing and looking forward to the next, cultivating collections and websites, or taking a break?

Henrik thinks there will be a tour in 2021: It is the 30th anniversary of Achtung Baby. And until then, we have to hear the new album when it comes in 2020. Or hear something of everything old. Or concentrate on something else entirely.

Connie is in line: I shut down a bit and kept free after giving it full skull with U2 on 3 consecutive tours where it has filled really much - in time and financially. I felt pretty saturated after the last tour. So U2 may well have to wait another 2-3 years before touring again. But then, on the other hand, I am also ready.

The identity - and all that you can't leave behind

It goes without saying: The music plays a huge role for U2 fans.

The music I do not discuss at all in this article, here I will refer to my good POV colleague, the music journalist Jan Eriksen. See, e.g. his [review of the U2 concert](#) in Copenhagen in 2018 here. But I know the feeling well when The Edges guitar triggers a shot of dopamine in my brain.

Many people think that Bono is a worse Saint-Francis and that he preaches too much and pays too little in taxes, but we do not find many of them in fan circles

My other good POV colleague Jakob Brønnum in 2012 analyzed the text universe of U2, which I also will not discuss, and you can read more about it in the book [World according to U2](#)

For some fans it is the music, for others it is the text universe and for some others again the whole staging and especially Bono's political profile. Many people think that Bono is a worse Saint-Francis and that he preaches too much and pays too little in taxes, but we do not find many of them in fan circles.

There is a lot of religion in the U2 texts. But there is also a religious attire on the superfan phenomenon, which one must be star-blind and toned to not detect:

There are a manageable number of gods (Bono, The Edge, Adam and Larry) worshiped on certain occasions (tours, concerts, recordings), performing specific rituals (participant, buyer, procurer,

poster, liker) and sacrifice. and submit to various trials (traveling far, spending money you do not have, eating poorly, sleeping too little).

You can live your dedication in many ways - by contemplating at home with the hearing aids, by attending the feasts, or by gathering relics and building temples and events in honor of the gods. In return, you get the community and you become united with a higher purpose = what the band stands for, at least in your interpretation.

Many superfans do not perceive themselves as religious, and they probably want to discourage trying to call them Bono as their god. Maybe the fan and superfan phenomenon can be better understood as an identity project?

In an [interview in The Independent](#) , Aaron Sams says that U2 fans are very generous, very open and accepting. I think part of it comes from U2 themselves and how they always pushed the idea that we're one but we're not the same. Aaron talks about himself.

Henrik says that what matters to fans is very different. He even likes the lyrics, the music, the stories, the religion, the humanity and that Bono doesn't fucking care what people think. The last is also Henrik, when a crazy idea has to be tried.

Fans can find quite different things in U2's narratives, which speak to them and their perception of themselves, who they are in the world and who they want to be. But it does not matter. In fact, it is perhaps an advantage and part of the explanation that U2 has stayed at or near the top for almost 40 years.

Under U2's wide, asymmetrical wings - the left wing is slightly wider than the right - there are many opportunities to immerse ourselves, spoon out and chase happiness while creating ourselves in different roles, practices and identities

We each find personal references in U2's music, text and in the aesthetic expression that strikes purely into our lives. They approach us and connect us and ours with something that is general and thus reverberate between us and others. We feel seen and understood by U2. U2 supports that we remain and are the ones we want to be.

Under U2's wide, asymmetrical wings - the left wing is slightly wider than the right - there are many opportunities to immerse ourselves, spoon out and chase happiness while creating ourselves in various roles, practices and identities:

As travelers, as knowledgeable, as gatherers, as servants, as activists, as nerds, as event-makers, as rock-and-roll festabe, as ¼ Asperger's or 1/8 something else.

In the apparent free space of rock music, we may be the same, but we can also be someone other than the ones we are in our ordinary - lovely or not very funny - life. Supplement and surplus for some, escapism for others.

As a super fan, the passion for U2 has become so strong that U2 and associated practices are an important or perhaps even the most important point of reference for organizing your life.

At least for periods. And during those times, you really feel like you're alive when you're a super fan - while you fucking be.

Statistics and Henrik say that U2 will be coming to Denmark again in 2021 or 2022. It will be an opportunity for fans and super fans to check in the queue and feel if they are alive. And for me to check if I am still a fan club member.