

## A NEW DOCUMENTARY ASKS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEATH OF KURT COBAIN



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In early April 1994, a tragedy played out in the city of Seattle, Wash., and eventually around the world. On April 8, the body of the lead singer of the rock band Nirvana, Kurt Cobain, was found in the greenhouse above his garage. This singer had been missing for several days. His death was ruled a suicide by a self-inflicted shotgun wound to the head. The band lost its leader, Courtney Love and Frances Bean Cobain lost a husband and a father, and Generation X lost its Elvis. This might have been the sad end of a story about fame, drugs and mental illness, but as the new documentary *Soaked in Bleach* demonstrates, it's a tale that continues to resonate, full of contradictions, oversights and maybe even murder.

*Soaked in Bleach* recounts the days surrounding the discovery of Cobain's body from the point of view of Tom Grant, the private detective hired by Courtney Love to find Cobain—he'd been missing for nearly a week before his body was found. Grant is a former L.A. County sheriff's detective and the documentary makes a good case for his investigative expertise. During his search for Cobain, and in the aftermath of the discovery of his body, Grant began to question the work of the Seattle Police Department as well as the veracity of Courtney Love's statements about Kurt's mental health, the future of Nirvana and the state of their marriage.

Grant eventually came out publicly in favor of a murder investigation and *Soaked in Bleach* tells the story of how this professional investigator found himself suspecting the woman who hired him of murder. The film makes its case using hours of recorded interviews grant conducted during his investigation. It also recreates scenes



*Soaked in Bleach* was released on DVD on Aug. 14. Visit [soakedinbleachthemovie.com/](http://soakedinbleachthemovie.com/) for more information

using actors to play Love and others. If recreated scenes of a suicide/murder investigation sound a little too much like any number of true crime television series currently crowding your cable dial, you're partly right. But, the production values of the scenes and the acting here is a full step above what you might expect from most television shows, and the scenes sweep you into the story just like they might in a biopic about the rock star.

But, more than television

shows, *Soaked in Bleach* calls to mind other documentary films that have been made about Cobain since his death. Nick Broomfield's 1998 film *Kurt & Courtney* was the first mainstream documentary to question the official story about Cobain's death. That film actually features an interview with Tom Grant offering-up his thoughts about what really happened to Cobain. However, *Kurt & Courtney* felt premature only a few years after Cobain's death, and Broom-

field's film—while an entertaining watch—ultimately feels sensational and exploitative. Even Broomfield concedes that his film was inconclusive in its questioning of the official story of Cobain's death.

*Soaked in Bleach* benefits from the concrete evidence of Grant's taped interviews. Where much of *Kurt & Courtney* felt like hearsay, here Love actually gets a chance to have her side heard through her own words in her own voice—a technique that feels fair but also

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proves troubling in its contradictory revelations. Director Benjamin Statler's building a film around recorded audio also recalls the recently released *Cobain: Montage of Heck*. That Cobain documentary takes its name and its core structure from a 36-minute audio collage that Cobain created on a four-track cassette recorder. The taped interviews in *Soaked in Bleach* justify Grant's theories, but when Statler starts interrupting dialog spoken by the actors with the actual voices of Love, Grant and others suddenly seeming to come out of the actor's mouths the filmmaker goes to far. In those moments, the recorded material becomes a disruptive element instead of a balancing one, and Statler risks his viewers losing trust in the most important evidence he and Grant present.

*Cobain: Montage of Heck* was made with cooperation from Cobain's estate and that film presents the singer as suicidal. *Soaked in Bleach* insists that Cobain would never have killed himself. Cobain was a troubled, formerly homeless artist with a history of drug addiction, and the chaos of his life and the warping lens of celebrity persist in disrupting and distorting the ongoing investigations of his death. ♦

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