



Catching Up with Rock 'n' Roll

Journalist Anthony DeCurtis



Anthony DeCurtis.
Courtesy photo

The classic scenario portrays an inexperienced young Midwesterner moving to New York City, getting schooled in the ways of the larger world, and transforming from well-meaning innocent to sophisticated success.

Music journalist Anthony DeCurtis, 64, flips the script.

He grew up in New York City's West Village when it was known as Little Bohemia and earned his bachelor's degree from Hunter College, an affiliate of the City University of New York. He likes to quip that he'd never been west of New Jersey before he made the bold move of applying to Indiana University in 1974 to pursue a Ph.D. in American literature and residency in a Midwest he regarded to be so unlike New York as to be exotic.

Long replanted in his native New York City, DeCurtis acknowledges that he comes back to Bloomington as often as he can. Just give him a reason. The most recent, in November, was being selected for the IU College Luminaries program, which seeks to connect students with the College of Arts and Sciences' "most influential, successful, and inspiring alumni."

"My critical sensibilities were formed here. I really feel like I use what I learned here really every day," the author and longtime contributing editor to *Rolling Stone* says. "I feel like I grew up here."

DeCurtis came to IU with the goal of becoming a college professor. But during the last year of his doctoral program, from late 1978 to August 1979, he wrote album reviews for Bloomington's *Herald-Times* (then *The Herald-Telephone*) and pursued music journalism in earnest after a

disappointing one-year academic appointment at Emory University in Atlanta.

Despite some lean times, he wound up becoming one of the pre-eminent journalists in the country covering rock 'n' roll and popular music — something he never imagined, not even in his own, private fantasy land. "Meeting all of the people I've met is pretty wild. The ones that were the trippiest to try to deal with were the ones who made a big impact on me when I was a kid," he says. "Getting to meet and interview George Harrison or Paul McCartney or Mick Jagger or Keith Richards or Pete Townshend or Ray Davies. I mean really. No one could imagine doing that."

In addition to big stories and interviews, DeCurtis has a Grammy Award for Best Album Notes and has written several books, including co-writing the legendary music impresario Clive Davis' autobiography, *The Soundtrack of My Life* (Simon & Schuster). He's currently working feverishly to finish a biography of Lou Reed, the late singer and songwriter for The Velvet Underground. "He was a complicated guy," DeCurtis says. "In many ways, he owed his career to journalists, because it wasn't the general public that supported The Velvet Underground. I think a part of him resented that."

DeCurtis also serves as a distinguished lecturer in creative writing at the University of Pennsylvania, which puts him back in the world he thought he'd inhabit when he first came to IU. "I always tell students you can't predict where your career will go. I've always thought that my journalism was kind of like splitting the difference with my academic training," he says. "I've been able to take the critical skills I learned at IU and apply them to subjects that millions of people love." ✨