

# Singer-songwriter Mark Lanegan dies at 57

Erik Schreiber  
24 February 2022

Singer Mark Lanegan (born in Ellensburg, Washington), who made his name as a member of 1990s grunge band the Screaming Trees, died earlier this week at age 57. A tweet from his official Twitter account announced his death on Tuesday but gave no details and asked fans to respect his family's privacy. He is survived by his wife Shelley.

Last year, Lanegan became seriously ill after contracting COVID-19. In his recent memoir *Devil in a Coma* (2021), he described his harrowing, near-death experience. Initially in denial about his infection, he became deaf, unable to breathe and unable to use one of his legs. He was hospitalized in Ireland, where, ironically, he had moved to escape the coronavirus. Doctors placed him in a medically induced coma and on kidney dialysis. He described the part of his hospitalization for which he was conscious as being "like a jail cocktail with a viral chaser."

Lanegan sang in a distinctive, husky baritone. He developed a straightforward style that eschewed histrionics and refined technique. His tone was by turns ruminative, gruffly tender, sorrowful or ominous. At its best, his singing was haunting and appeared to arise genuinely from the well of human experience.

In 1985, Lanegan joined the Screaming Trees. Based in Washington state, the band combined the do-it-yourself ethos of punk and indie rock with influences such as the blues, psychedelic rock and heavy 1970s bands, such as Led Zeppelin. After the release of their popular single "Nearly Lost You" in 1992, the Screaming Trees came to be associated with the grunge movement. The band did not achieve the same commercial success as peers like Soundgarden and Alice in Chains. Perhaps this was because its sound seemed less contemporary than that of the other grunge bands. Nevertheless, the Screaming Trees gained a significant following.

While still a member of the band, Lanegan began a

solo career that included albums such as *The Winding Sheet* (1990), on which Nirvana's Kurt Cobain sang backing vocals, and *Whiskey for the Holy Ghost* (1994). In 1995, Lanegan and Screaming Trees drummer Barrett Martin participated in the grunge "supergroup" Mad Season, which included members of Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam.

After the Screaming Trees broke up in 2000, Lanegan contributed vocals to *Rated R* (2000), the second album by hard rock band Queens of the Stone Age. He officially joined the group shortly afterward. The band's subsequent album *Songs for the Deaf* (2002) was certified gold and brought the group to wider attention. The singles "No One Knows" and "Go with the Flow" received Grammy nominations.

During and after his time in the Queens of the Stone Age, Lanegan collaborated with many other artists who worked in various styles. He formed the Gutter Twins with Greg Dulli, the vocalist of Afghan Whigs, and recorded music with Isobel Campbell, a former singer of indie pop group Belle and Sebastian. Lanegan contributed a version of Bob Dylan's "The Man in the Long Black Coat" to the soundtrack of *I'm Not There* (2007), Todd Haynes's fictionalized film about the latter singer.

Lanegan published his first memoir *Sing Backwards and Weep* in 2020. His friend Anthony Bourdain, the celebrity chef, had urged him to write the book, which chronicles his substance abuse and its effects on his personal relationships. Among the personal tragedies that the book recounts is the suicide of Lanegan's friend Cobain.

In interviews during 2020, he espoused conspiracy theories related to the pandemic, including the belief that the coronavirus was associated with 5G technology. He renounced these ideas the following year. "I was one of those knuckleheads who was wary of the vaccine," he told *Consequence*. "But I learned

my lesson. I'll be the first one to get a booster shot when it's available in Ireland.”

In *Devil in a Coma*, Lanegan likened his COVID-19 infection to a type of retribution for his previous abuse of alcohol and heroin. Ultimately he overcame his addictions and had been sober for more than 10 years as of 2020. During his illness, episodes from his past came back to him in dreams and visions. “I’d taken my share of well-deserved ass-kickings over the years, but this thing was trying to dismantle me, body and mind, and I could see no end to it,” he wrote.

He earned the respect not only of his peers and of younger musicians but also of an older generation of artists. “I can’t process this,” wrote musician and producer John Cale in a tweet responding to Lanegan’s death. Cale is famous for, among other things, his work with the Velvet Underground and his production of the first album by proto-punk band the Stooges. “Mark Lanegan will always be etched in my heart—as he surely touched so many with his genuine self, no matter the cost, true to the end,” wrote Cale.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**