

MUSIC

Chris Cornell's Friend Says Rocker Seemed to Be 'Really Fighting to Get Through' Show Before Suicide

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POSTED ON MAY 20, 2017 AT 11:31AM EDT

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Nearly 48 hours after [Chris Cornell died of suicide](#) by hanging following a performance at Detroit's Fox Theatre, fans and loved ones of the late rocker returned to the Michigan concert venue to pay their respects in a touching sidewalk candlelight vigil.

Among the roughly 50 mourners gathered in the cold, drizzly evening was Detroit artist and musician [Kevin Morris](#) — a friend of Cornell's and onetime roadie for the singer's bands Soundgarden and Audioslave.

Morris, who talked to Cornell six to seven times a year including at the beginning of what now has become the 52-year-old frontman's final tour, happened to be at Cornell's show on Wednesday.

He told PEOPLE that while he was in “utter shock” at Cornell's death, the signs that something was wrong with his friend were there at the show.

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Chris Cornell at his final show

// J. RYAN/SPLASH NEWS ONLINE

“The whole performance you could tell something wasn’t right,” Morris recounted. “Into the second song he started getting disoriented or something. I just figured he wasn’t feeling well.”

“Everybody felt there was something going on,” Morris continued. “Like he wasn’t with us. Like he was on a cloud. It was like he was really fighting to get through the show.”

Cornell was found dead at MGM Grand Detroit on Wednesday night. Medical examiners have ruled that [Cornell died of suicide by hanging](#), but [his family have since spoken out](#) saying they believe that the side effects of the prescription drug Ativan may have led him to thoughts of self-harm. (Worsening depression and thoughts of self-harm are known rare side effects of

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“He’s been clean for years,” Morris said. “He talked to his wife right before and right after the show... He was working very hard to make everyone happy. He loved Detroit. What was troubling him I don’t think we’ll ever know. I think he was a little nervous about playing in Detroit, the music capital of the world, and he took a little too much of the Ativan.”

Morris got the news of Cornell’s death in the middle of the night: “I’d just laid down to go to sleep and my sister called around 1 a.m.,” he said. He’s since been in touch with Cornell’s wife, Vicky.

At Friday’s vigil, Morris brought an abstract painting he made for Vicky — whom he said already owns about five of his paintings from over the years. (The



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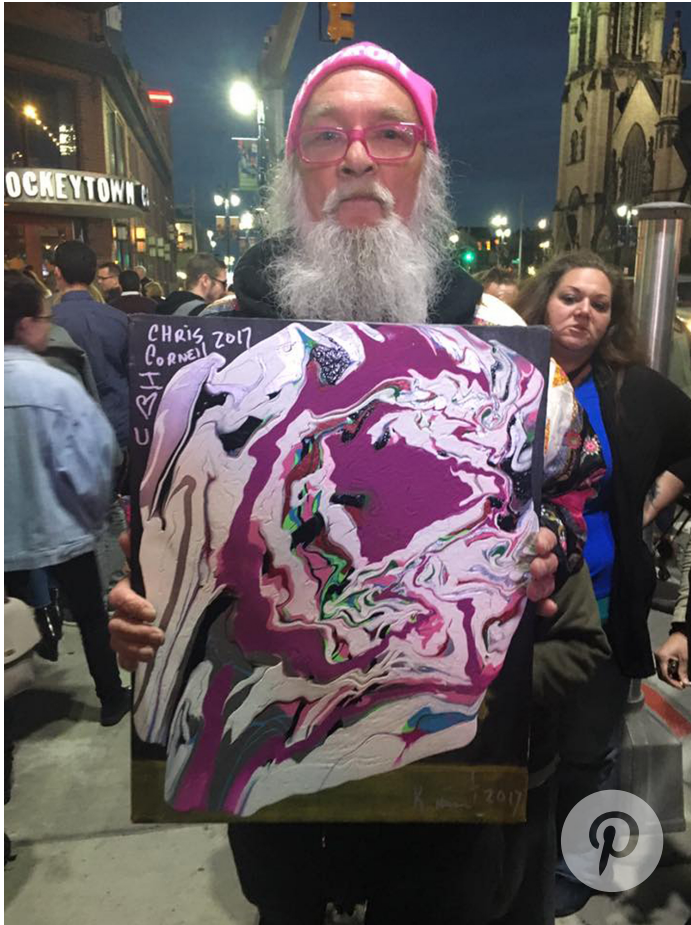


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couple had bought them over the years and the new painting was made on Thursday after Cornell's death.)



Kevin Morris

// SOURCE: METRO-DETROIT POLITICAL ACTION NETWORK/FACEBOOK

It was one of the many items fans brought to the tribute, organized by Adriene Avripas — a registered nurse whose group advocates for marginalized people, including those with mental illnesses.

“Chris Cornell was a huge activist,” she explained. “People use music to comfort them and show beauty to the world. We felt that we wanted to show support to the family, fans and anyone suffering from mental illness.”

Suicide prevention experts were on hand at the event for anyone who needed support; they spoke about what to look for in someone who is struggling, passed out cards and wrist bands with a hotline number and the words “I will not give up.”



Candlelight vigil for Chris Cornell at the Fox

Theatre

// SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY

The diverse group — old and young, men and women — still seemed stunned at the news of Cornell's death as they lit candles and laid flowers. There were hugs. One woman was inconsolable after joining in with a singer as he performed Soundgarden's "Fell on Black Days."

One fan, Tammy, visibly shaken by the death, had seen Cornell perform dozens of times over the years.

"I called in sick [for work] Thursday," she said. "I feel like he didn't know how much his fans loved him. It was an awesome show but he just didn't seem happy. I felt like: We are letting him down as a crowd. I felt like maybe he wanted us to stand up more. He always came back [from his struggles over the years]. I was just shocked."

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Her account and Morris' are different than that of Detroit photographer [Ken Settle](#), who was also at the show. He previously told PEOPLE that Cornell was "more joyous" than he'd seen before.

"He'd always been, back in the early days especially, kind of a brooding performer, more introspective, sometimes looking down at his guitar most of the time with his hair in his face. At this show, it was the opposite of that," Settle said.

"His voice was great. He was hitting all of the high notes," Settle added. "The artistry of the band. This was not a retread. There was still a creative force. They weren't just putting it on cruise control. It was one powerful band. That spark, the energy and the artistry was still there."

RELATED: [Chris Cornell's Life in Photos](#)

Still, in hindsight, Settle said there were signs — including the band's decision to close out their show with a Led Zeppelin song woven in with one of their own. It's title: "In My Time of Dying."

"It's a very odd choice to weave that in and now it does make you wonder," Settle said. "There is so much that does point to a person who perhaps knew what was coming up, which is so sad. It makes me look at my pictures to search his eyes to see if there is a clue, something he's saying that people were missing."

If you or someone you know is considering suicide, please contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).



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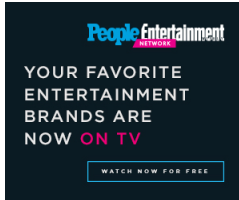
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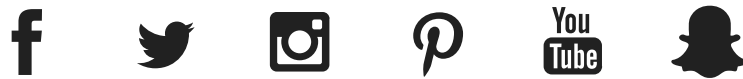
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