

Tomorrow's vintage rock 'n' roll today

By **EDDIE HUFFMAN**
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Michael Jackson makes front-page headline news. Music programs fill the nation's airwaves. The gap between popular success and critical acclaim continues to shrink. Great new records appear regularly in record stores. Only halfway through the year, 1984 is shaping up as one of the best years for popular music since the 1960s.

Rock 'n' roll has had some impact on culture from the beginning, but the foundations of rock as pop culture which were laid in the 1960s almost disappeared in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, the '60s were a distant, revered memory and no one seemed to take contemporary music very seriously. Things are gradually changing so that now music has the far-reaching impact it once had but avoids the worst impulses of the 1960s. No "rock is poetry." No ridiculous labels and expectations placed on "rock leaders" like Dylan and the Beatles as in the 1960s. None of the excesses that can lead to an Altamont. Just fabulous music that has a positive effect on the people that hear it.

Most of the best music of 1984 is also the most popular. Albums by the Pretenders, Cyndi Lauper, Bruce Springsteen and Prince have had a tremendous impact. Fine records from Little Steven, the Cars, Joe Jackson, the Psychedelic Furs, Dwight Twilley, Tina Turner, Elvis Costello, Lionel Richie and Van Halen have enlivened America's airwaves. In fact Van Halen's "Jump" is one of the best singles of the decade. Young bands on

independent labels have also fared well. Everyone from the Meat Puppets to Tommy Keene have received support from college radio and critics.

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of the year's music is an infusion of new blood: Hard-edged rap is gradually gripping the nation's consciousness, young bands like R.E.M. and Jason and the Scorchers are gaining ground, and an exhilarating sense of pure fun has returned through artists as diverse as Tracey Ullman, Ray Parker Jr., and the fictional band Spinal Tap from the "rockumentary" *This is Spinal Tap*. A clean spirit runs through 1984's music that had been absent since the mid-1960s.

Even the year's darkest music offers hope. Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders and Bruce Springsteen may seem deeply depressing on one level, but their lyrics are

undershot with killer rock 'n' roll that allows you to dance right over the cynicism. Hynde and Springsteen's characters may be desperately trapped, but they are

also furiously alive. Their stories are the year's most fascinating and the year's best.


The South's best also has a lot to offer the entire nation in 1984. The "New Southern Pop" of the aforementioned R.E.M., Jason and the Scorchers and Tommy Keene combined with records from Let's Active, Oh-OK, and the long-anticipated third album from the dB's add up to a revitalization of the region that gave birth to rock 'n' roll in the first place. A good new album from Tom Petty would cap 1984 as the South's best year for music since the rockabilly heyday of the

1950s.


1984 even has something to offer to those stubborn adherents to music from the 1960s: albums from that decade's biggest stars that have had their greatest impact this year. Records from Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, the Rolling Stones, and a posthumous release from John Lennon are all good. Dylan and Simon's albums particularly give hopes for renewed greatness in the not-too-distant future from both artists.

We should consider ourselves

lucky. America is undergoing a musical renaissance. Great records are appearing regularly, independent labels are faring well, college radio is gaining more impact, commercial radio is improving, mass media is giving music more of the attention it deserves, and perhaps most importantly, pop music is once again influencing culture in a vital, healthy way. Not since the 1960s has music had such force — enjoy it while it lasts.




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