

Albums

# D.C. 'hardcore' craze stays alive by playing by the rules

By **RANDY BULLOCK**  
Special to the DTH

Hardcore is by now a worldwide force. It has changed alternative music forever and is going the way of any musical "movement" by mutating into subgenres and, by the law of averages, has an outside chance of mutating into something acceptable by the masses.

It may be just a matter of time before Dick Clark begins introducing the latest hardcore sleaze to a crowd of glassy-eyed nubiles eager to writhe their barely clad bodies for the smiling TV eye. So, before this happens, it is necessary to strike a blow for artistic integrity and guide the wayward listener to a wonderful land where quality comes before capitalism and a sense of purpose is maintained. This is speaking of music only, of course, for the place in question is Washington, D.C.

The pocket of musicians there continue in the traditional hardcore

mode, ignoring both Satan and skateboards, and churning out generally high quality music with a positive message. Under the influential umbrella of Spiritual Grandfather Ian MacKaye (ex-Minor Threat), these musicians seem inclined to follow a few basic guidelines.

1. In order not to confuse music with a fashion statement, hair should be cut "normally" (i.e. without spikes or mohawks) or, for easy maintenance, cut off entirely.

2. Any cover versions of songs on vinyl must be either "Stepping Stone" by the Monkees or an old Wire tune.

3. Only one album per band, and then the band must either break up to mate with other bands, completely shuffle its line-up, or change its name. This last rule keeps the scene in a constant state of flux, keeps everyone from making any real money, and creates a steady flow of posthumous vinyl that rivals Elvis and Hendrix

repackages in number.

Whether these rules are the cause or not, the fact remains that Washington all but started hardcore in its present form, and is one of the major scenes consistently turning out relevant music in any great amount. Dag Nasty, a relative oldster as far as band longevity goes, recently broke rule number three by releasing a second album without breaking up for good. We'll let them slide because they HAVE broken up once, replaced their old bassist, and changed singers three times at least.

Their first album was uniformly excellent and marked them as the band most likely to pick up where Minor Threat left off. This is not only because both bands share guitarist Brian Baker, but because they both favor a lot of jerky tempo changes and spoken/screamed lyrics dealing with self-awareness and relationships gone wrong. On the second album, they partially break from the stand-

ard thrash mold with a more Descendents-style pop sound and one acoustic ballad which is not that bad, although it does prove that hardcore singers sound a bit better behind snarling guitars. Dag Nasty still puts on entertaining, energetic shows and should be playing near here soon.

Soulside, after line-up changes and a name change (from Lunchmeat), have released their first album, *Becoming Less to Be Nothing*, and it is likely to become the best vinyl to come out of the scene this year. There is the obligatory Wire cover, a varied but nearly always pulverizing guitar attack, and good chant-oriented lyrics. Soulside are also excellent live.

Other bands you will not see live any more because they follow rule number three to the letter are Beefeater, Rites of Spring and Gray Matter. Beefeater were crusaders for human rights and perhaps the last bastion of honest, humanistic political thought in the music scene. They released an album two years ago and flicker out now with an EP and an LP. *Need a Job* is the very cohesive EP that carries on their banners of social awareness to a jazz-punk-funk hybrid beat with songs about apartheid, unemployment and working

for the government. Their album, *House Burning Down*, is a slightly more playful affair with individual compositions by each band member and more experimentation with "found" vocals, etc. and a guest vocalist spot by Alec MacKaye of Faith. Both are quite worthwhile.

Rites of Spring and Gray Matter were both scene staples for a while and both go out with an EP. Gray Matter's is tighter than their album and displays a more mature approach to the basic thrash formula they embraced. Good, solid fare.

Rites of Spring, after releasing one of the most disturbing albums of all time, tone down their sonic assault a bit for an equally pleasing EP. They've retained their dense, brooding melodic style. Their lyrics are still ridden with angst and sung by Guy Piccioto, the most tortured vocalist to bring out the beauty in despair. If Dostoevski wielded a strat, he would sound like this.

A note to the already tormented: Rites of Spring has reformed as Happy Go Licky with all new songs wherein they clothe their excruciating agony in a slightly less heavy, neo-psychedlic vein.

There you have it. Support your local music scene.

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