

Bands were 'whacky' during 1980's

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of penning both wildly perverse grunge and brilliantly perverse mainstream tunes.

The Soul Asylum, in contrast to their fellow Minnesotans, have remained fairly constant. Their unique blend of punk, heavy metal, and country, supported by some of the most ingenious and ironic lyrics uttered in rock and roll history, steadfastly remains its own wonderfully bizarre self.

Perhaps the best punk band of the 80's, however, was the Dead

Milkmen. Through four albums of political utterance, bad taste, drug trips, and, always, very serious humor, the Milkmen have consistently proven themselves one of the most challenging acts of the decade.

Whether they're singing about toxic waste ("Watching Scotty Die.") Reagan's America ("Right Wing Pigeons,") intolerance of those who are different ("Nitro-Burning Funny Cars,") or the general sad state the world's in ("Life is Shit,") the Dead Milkmen provide an intelligent and

wildly fun ride for anyone with the guts to enter the group's strange and dangerous world.

The 80's were filled to bursting with ignored and misunderstood bands. The Circle Jerks have been carrying on the fine tradition of British punk pioneered by the Sex Pistols throughout the decade. They produced enough material for a "Greatest Hits" compilation called "Golden Shower of Hits," which featured a cover depicting gold records jammed into a grungy urinal.

David Bowie finished up the decade with a punk band, after spending most of the decade in misguided pursuit of superstardom. Bowie's Tin Machine specialized in a sort of free-form punk that condemned the world as a morally bankrupt monstrosity that will swallow everything it can if we let it. Quite a far cry from "Let's Dance."

With only two albums, Jane's Addiction has established itself as a very powerful outfit. Combining punk, heavy metal, and reggae sensibilities with lyrics that concern themselves with everything from the power of the media to the nature of God to the biography of a bag lady, the Addiction churns out hypnotic, thought-provoking, and almost-dancable music that lingers in the mind for quite some time.

Metallica spent the decade being innovators. First, they invented speed metal, then an apology raised it to an art-form. Metallica's improvement as a band is palpable over time; their latest album expresses concern over pollution, a world where justice is controlled by money, and the ultimate futility of life: that it inevitably end in death. Metallica is a very intelligent group of young men who deserve to be heard and understood by the world at large.

And the tenth and final forgotten act of the 80's is (drumroll please) ... the Stormtroopers of Death!

Formed by two vacationing members of Anthrax (another great unknown band,) the S.O.D. cranked out one whole album's

worth of the most mind-numbingly strange speed metal ever heard, "Speak English or Die." The cover contained that mocking title and a wonderfully typical skull, this one in an army helmet emblazoned with an anarchy symbol and chomping on a lit cigar.

The S.O.D. played incredibly fast and mercilessly lampooned the speed metal style. It's all here: the mumbled lyrics delivered at 900 miles per hour that make little or no sense once they're deciphered, the mildly proficient guitar solos, the incomprehensible in-jokes and studio patter, and all for the price of just one album! What a whacky bunch of guys.

Perhaps "whacky" is a good word for the 80's in general. America was gripped by "Reagan Mania," while around the world atrocities were being committed against humanity and freedom. The pop charts, over this backdrop, were dominated by mindless fluff performed by people who apparently grew up thinking that disco was a pretty neat idea, while most of the intelligent and innovative music, the music capable of pointing out the problems, languished in the underground.

I suppose that Prince captured the image best in "1990:" "Two thousand zero zero, party's over, we're outta time/But tonight we're gonna party like it's 1999." I guess America did spend the 80's dancing in the face of Armageddon.

Whether that's scary or reassuring, I don't know. It is whacky, though, eh?

Decade just a drab rehash of the past at higher price

By RICHARD SANTORO

Talking about this decade gives us a headache. First, it isn't even over until Jan. 1, 1991. And second, the past 10 years have been a colorless "greatest hits" affair with nothing original to offer.

The only possibility is rap, which is, at best, a mixed blessing. The 80's have been a bastion of no advance technology: updates of things which have been around a long time. Fax machines, for one, were available in the '70s. They didn't catch on until recently. Compact discs offer marginal to no improvement over conventional L.P.s at nearly twice the price. Promises of cheaper C.D.s have proved unreliable at best.

And what other miracles did

we get in 10 years? The reinvented telephone, the 60s, psychedelia, folk music, disco, country and western and a 100 other familiar, tiresome retreads.

The '80s offered nothing but the past at higher prices. Supposed trendsetters like Madonna, Michael Jackson and George Michael strike us as the equivalent to Bobby Sherman, David Cassidy and The Brady Bunch (themselves constantly on the reunion trail.) When the latter were popular, their contributions were placed in proper perspective by truly talented acts that appealed to a more developed taste.

The music today that has grit and ability is almost exclusively relegated to a constantly shrinking independent label bias. That platform grows smaller because major labels band together in an

effort to do away with the competition.

Several years ago MTV announced it would no longer air videos by anyone that wasn't on a large corporate label like CBS or Warner Brothers. They starve small guys by making it impossible to do business within the system and then they buy out their best acts (which have been carefully helped along and brought to public recognition without any outside help) leaving the original producer to start over.

In 1980, there were plenty of bright, intelligent artists on unheard of labels. In 1989 about 90 percent of those good, small labels have died. Compact discs (for years a closed an heavily promoted major label commodity) is, in large part, responsible for the demise of the free market system in music that the past 10 years has wrought.

And in the next decade you can expect more talentless twits like Madonna passing for greatness because the artistic field of vision has become so narrow. Twenty years from now she will have become what Shelley Winters is today.

It's why the '60s have turned into such a wonder for the younger generation. The old music, showing up at inflated compact prices, is like nothing you can get these days. It's another reason you are seeing the resurgence of pseudo-hippies wandering around.

The kids graduating from high school in the '80s have had no original cultural base to call their own.

Poetry Association offers four contests

Poetry prizes worth \$44,000 will be awarded to 608 poets by the American Poetry Association in 1990. The association will sponsor four separate contests this year, doubling its efforts to discover new talent.

"Students win many of our prizes. They are in a creative time of life, and we look forward to reading their work," said Robert Nelson, publisher for the association.

Each contest awards a \$1,000 grand prize, a \$500 first prize, and a total of \$11,000 in prizes to 152 winners. All adults who

write poetry are welcome to enter.

For the current contest, poets may send up to six poems, each no more than 20 lines, name and address on each page, to American Poetry Association, Dept. CO-30, 250-A Potrero St., P.O. Box 1803, Santa Cruz, Ca 95061. Poems must be postmarked by March 31 to meet the deadline. A new contest starts April 1.

Each poem will also be considered for publication in the *American Poetry Anthology*, a hardcover collection of contemporary verse.

\$500 PRIZES \$100

Standing Up for Peace CONTEST



Why have some people risked their jobs, their homes, their families and even prison to take a stand for peace? This is *your* chance to find out. The Standing Up for Peace Contest invites you to talk face to face with someone who has refused to fight in war, pay taxes for war, or build weapons for war, and to hear what it's like to take a stand and risk the consequences.

In this contest, you're asked to interview someone who has said *no* to war, and then to express what you think and feel about what you heard by writing something or creating a work of art or music.

The contest is open to young people ages 15-23. The deadline for entries is May 1, 1990.

To enter, send for the Standing Up for Peace Contest Booklet, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960, (914) 358-4601.

Standing Up for Peace is a project of the 1990 Celebration of Conscience Committee. Co-sponsors include: CCCO/An Agency for Draft and Military Counseling, Conscience and Military Tax Campaign, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Mennonite Central Committee, Midwest Committee for Military Counseling, National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors, National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, Peace Tax Foundation, War Resisters League.