

Chris Garcia's

DRINK TANK

The Forgotten Decade of Recording: the 1980s

If you're not a fan of my obsession of lists, this might not be the year for you to read *The Drink Tank*. I got a bug in my bonnet and I want to put pixels to paper about it. It's a thing that sounds weird, but it's legit. I've been a fan of the National Film Registry since I first encountered it in the early part of our decade. That led to an interest in the other major US arts registry, the National Recording Registry. Now, while there's no National Video Registry (it might be included in the National Film Registry, but it's never been explained), the Recording Registry is my second favorite. I've started following it and researching a lot. I've nominated for the Recording Registry twice (and the Film Registry four times, I think) and when I went over the list of what's on recently, I found a major problem.

There are only six and a bit recordings from the 1980s on the Registry.

The Registry is dedicated to the purpose of maintaining and preserving sound recordings and collections of sound recordings that are culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant. That includes music, anthropological recordings (which are some of the most interesting), radio broadcasts, comedy, serials, sports, and all sorts of other stuff. They just need to be culturally, historically or aesthetically significant. For the most part, I've considered music more than anything else, but there's a lot of ground that can be covered.

The recordings from that decade that are already on include *The Message* by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1982),

Katharine Payne's recordings of African Elephants (1984), *Daydream Nation* by Sonic Youth (1988), *Graceland* by Paul Simon (1986) and *Thriller* (1982) and *He Stopped Loving Her Today* by George Jones (1980). The bit is that the Crescent City Living Legends Collection extends from 1973 through 1990. An argument could also be made that the 1990s are even more under-represented because there are only two recordings, Nirvana's *Nevermind* and Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* (and a bit of the Crescent City Living Legends).

Why are the 80s so very important to present on the Registry? Well, the 80s changed music more than any other decade. There was the beginning of the Goth, Hard Core and US Ska movements. There was the introduction of computer music to the mainstream and the rise of techno. There was the rise of the music video leading to a new world of music stars. Drum machines, Synths, Keytars, they all came to the forefront in the 1980s. It was also the last productive decade for some of the most important acts in history. Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Eubie Blake, Gil Evans, they were all working in the decade.

And yes, there are other recordings from other decades that certainly need to be on there. Three off the top of my head include the original recording of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, *Jagged Little Pill* from Alanis Morissette, and *Music from Mathematics*, the Decca record that has most of the known music performed on the IBM 7090



by folks like JR Pierce and Max Mathews. Still, I'm a crusader for the 80s!

I've griped about this before, I know, but not I'm doing something. I've decided to dedicate one article a an issue to the recordings of the 1980s that I believe deserve to be on the Registry. These'll include albums that are massively important to the mainstream, things that were essentially underground but had influence far-beyond their exposure, and things that are the perfect example of their times.

How many pieces will there be? I'm planning on 20 or so, and I'm hoping that some of you will have your suggestions which I can run. I'll print them. At some point, I'll send the list off to the good folks at the Library of Congress as my nominations. You see, it'll all have a point in the end!

And so I'll start with my first in this issue.

Minor Threat by Minor Threat

There aren't many bands that were together for less than three years that you can point to as being a major influence on any scene today. I can come up with two: Operation Ivy (1987-1989) and Minor Threat (1980-1983). While Oplvy had a huge influence on the 1990s and 2000s, and I'll talk about them later, Minor Threat's influence extends beyond just the music. They opened up a lifestyle, they defined a new sound and they made a mark that you can see to today.

Minor Threat featured four or five members during its short lifespan. There was Jeff Nelson on drums, Lyle Preslar and Brian Baker on guitar, Steve Hansgen on bass, and perhaps most importantly, Ian MacKaye on vox. They were a group who played fast and hot, in the style of punk flipped to 78rpm. The sound was hardcore punk, which we call simply Hard Core today. The vocals weren't really sung, but screamed. There really short songs, and they were loud and they were frantic. The crowd went into wildness. There was slamdancing, but it was the hardcore scene, starting on the West Coast, that introduced moshpits to the world.

And the definition of Hardcore was Minor Threat.

Every Hard Core band you see over the last 25 years was seriously influenced by Minor Threat. You can see it in bands like Voorhees, 7 Seconds and Gorilla Biscuits. While there was an LA Hard Core scene, it was the East Coast sound of Minor Threat that would be the most

influential.

The album that should go onto the registry is the first Minor Threat 7-inch, called *Minor Threat*. This was the first salvo, and while some would point to *Out of Step*, their sole 12' album, the 7-inch *Minor Threat* is rawer, angrier and simply more powerful. It also included the song that would launch an entire movement that would extend all the way to today.

There had been songs in the 1970s and early 80s that basically said that the bands weren't going to live like rock stars and that the fans shouldn't either, but it was Ian MacKaye's song *Straight Edge* that made it into a movement. While the rest of the band wasn't too fond of MacKaye's concept of pitching a clean living lifestyle in their music, MacKaye followed up the general concept begun in *Straight Edge* with *Out of Step*'s lyrics. **Don't smoke/Don't drink/Don't fuck/At least I can fucking think/I can't keep up/I'm out of step with the world.** That concept launched the Straight Edge movement, which peaked first in the 1990s (along with Hard Core) only to find itself reborn in recent years and the Straight Edge movement take on so much presence in the collective consciousness that there's a wrestler, CM Punk, whose gimmick is that he's the sanctimonious leader of the



Straight Edge Society. That's saying something.

So, my first album held up for the Registry is Minor Threat's *Minor Threat*. It is available as a part of several compilations, including *First Two 7's on a 12"*. I still maintain that *Minor Threat* is the best of their recorded output and that it is easily the best of the early Hard Core recordings. That combined with their impact over the Straight Edge make them a significant piece that should be added to the Registry.

Next issue, I look at a record that changed the volume of the pop charts forever.

Radio Wallpaper

Tara Wayne

I read issue 54 of Robert Lichtman's *King Biscuit Time*, and wrote a LoC. For a laugh, I called it "Soaking in Gravy." Why the long titles on fanzines these days? It's fine as it goes, but I end up with file names that are so long they don't show entirely until highlight the icon.

King Biscuit Time is an apazine, so I don't know how many readers it has outside of the select members of FAPA. He sent a .pdf file on request, and I was motivated to comment on Robert's account of his life-long interest in pop music.

He reminded me of the varying role pop music played in my own life. When I was a kid, the radio was usually on. I don't know if my folks listened to it – I usually didn't. It was merely music-coloured wallpaper. I know that Perry Como or Peggy Lee must have been on much of the time, but I don't remember the middle-of-the-road content well. Novelty songs usually stuck in my memory. For instance, while I consumed my hated shredded wheat every morning, there was a CBC news program on the air. For years it opened with a theme performed by barking dogs!

"Arf, arf, arf, arf..." It had a real tune.

I recall "Please Mr. Custer, I Don't Want to Go," for example, "Sink the Bismarck," a silly song about an astronaut who forgot his crayons, "Purple People Eater," the Witchdoctor song, "Wolverton Mountain" (or was it called "Clifton Clowers?"), "Return to Sender,"

"Twenty-one Miles," "The Battle of New Orleans," "Watching the Girls Go By," and tons of others. Now and then something odd but not humorous would also stick. I only recently googled for and found the lyrics to "A Scottish Soldier." And I know I heard Elvis sing "Hound Dog" around 1957 – the same year I watched Sputnik in the night sky – though people have told me it was impossible in a backwoods like Toronto. But I swear! There were teenage death/love songs too, like "Teen Angel," – but those tended to turn my stomach.

Early in the 60's my parents bought a console stereo. They stocked it with about two dozen records, and stopped. I suppose the little well for them was full. Their taste seemed to run to Scottish military bands, 101 Strings, and Christmas songs. I had one or two that I picked out myself. One was the music from Disney's *Peter Pan*, I remember. The other was a George Formby collection. You can see that I has my own taste in musical matters. I was a born rebel.

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One day around 1966 or '67 my friends all seemed to go nuts about something called "The Beatles." "What are Beatles," I naturally asked. They all looked at me as though I had just arrived – luggage in hand – from the Moon. They told me,

and, following my natural inclinations, I scoffed. In actual fact, when I heard "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "Please, Please Me" for the first time, I didn't think they were that bad. They weren't terribly good either, so I put the matter out of my mind. What finally turned me on to the Beatles was that odd cartoon show that was on TV for one year. I got to hear later Beatles tunes like "Ticket to Ride" and "A Hard Day's Night," and realized that This Was A Good Thing.

All the same, I had no real interest in music. Most of my musical experience in the 60's was from the 30 seconds that led into cartoon shows or sitcoms. I still know all the words to the song sung at the end of *Fireball XL-5*.

"I wish I were a fi-yer ball, the fastest man alive!

I'd fly around the universe, in *Fireball XL-five*." And how!





cracked me up. I added *Talking Heads*, Elvis Costello, and XTC to my tastes. Toward the end, I was avidly collecting disks by some very “arty” groups. I have David Byrne’s solo efforts, experimental music by Brian Eno, almost all the early Pere Ubu, and was getting into Captain Beefheart at the peak of my esoteric phase.

By the late 80’s though, I was growing jaded. Esoterica like Nina Hagen palled, and emotionally unaffected New Wave like Gary Newman or Bauhaus simply bored me. (Flashy, simple-minded porridge performed by groups like Duran Duran never appealed at all.) Worry about wear on the disks and stylus, concerns with surface quality, doubts about the performance of

My musical awakening came in the early 70’s, when a friend of mine left Toronto. He couldn’t take it with him, so sold me his phonograph for \$25, and I began to buy records. I hardly knew where to start, but I’d heard enough in wallpaper in the meantime to make a decent beginning with “Dark Side of the Moon,” “Abbey Road” and “Sgt. Pepper’s,” “Close to the Edge,” and one or two other staples. I gravitated toward studio-produced super groups like Yes, *Genesis*, and *King Crimson*, but decidedly not to over-ripe bands like *ELO* or *The Moody Blues*.

Sometime around 1977, Bob Wilson discovered New Wave. I remember him playing *Devo* for me for the first time in his and Janet’s Avenue Road apartment. “Jocko Homo”

the equipment I had, all began to erode my enjoyment of the music. By the time I had to move to my present place in 1991, I had stopped listening to music altogether. My musical needs were being met mainly via reruns of *Newhart* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, just like before.

It was more than ten years before I started to put vinyl on the turntable with serious intent again. By then, the equipment was terribly old, and some of it marginally functional. Speakers and amp had to be replaced, the tape recorder outright trashed, and then the used amplifier I got as a replacement is also started to go... Schirm gave me a small CD player for Christmas, so for the first time I started looking in the bins for CDs.

Now I mainly listen to music while using the computer. I pop a CD into the tray or pick an MP3 file from the hard drive. It isn’t really “listening” to music as I used to – lying on the bed, eyes closed, focusing exclusively on the sound. But it’s better than listening to the 300th. rendition of “Now listen to mah story ‘bout a man named Jed...” I must be getting some good from listening... so far as I really do. My musical tastes have expanded again, to include Tom Waits, authentic old cowboy songs by Ed McCurdy, and even some hard core jazz.

The jazz can still be rather impenetrable though. Unless I recognized “Salt Peanuts,” I couldn’t tell you whether it was Dizzy Gillespie playing, or Charlie Parker. I have no trouble with Louis Armstrong, though, and you can bet I don’t mistake Duke Ellington era jazz for Miles Davis.

I’ve also rediscovered some performers I used to like, but had stopped following long ago. Elvis Costello is the best example, but I’m newly crazy again for Gentle Giant. I’m even listening to Frank Sinatra.

Listening to music has become a solitary pastime, though. What I miss about my musical experience in the ‘70s is sitting around with Bob, or Victoria, listening to their new discoveries, and adding some of them to my “Must Have” list. Nobody seems to have time for that anymore. Both Bob and Victoria live just outside Toronto now, and out of reach by ordinary busses or streetcars. I suspect, too, that our musical tastes may have grown too far apart as well. Bob is heavily into jazz. Victoria... I’m not sure. I don’t think she plays music to “listen” to anymore. She protests that

she hasn't the time. Her major interest had always been orchestral anyway, which would understandably turn into acoustic wall paper if you were also trying to de-bug a program, or proofread a document.

We used to have lively debates over our listening. Is Kate Bush better than Lene Lovich? Is Tubular Bells really the future of Rock? Is Emerson, Lake and Palmer just another over-produced band like ELO, or are they actually good? One time when I insisted Yes was better than Devo, Bob replied "naturally, they outnumber Devo." I miss those ripostes. Everyone's taste in wallpaper is highly personal, but it's not something they shed blood over.

("Radio Wallpaper" was originally a LoC on King Biscuit Time 54. The first paragraph has been revised, and a few lines added here and there)

(This introduction related the first two paragraphs when "Radio Wallpaper" was posted to FurAffinity in mid-December '09.

"Not long ago I read a short fanzine and wrote a letter to it. The editor had written about his life-long interest in pop music. Of course, most of us have an interest in contemporary music, to one degree or another. But it got me thinking of my own, and I began to write –"



Art this issue features a cover from Mo Starkey, who also did that piece above called Medusa Mirror which I really like. She gave me an entire CD full of stuff and I'll be rolling it out over the next few months. Taral did the piece that's on the first page of his article. The record covers are Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's The Message from Sugar Hill Records, Minor Threat from Dischord records and Abby Road from Apple Records. I think that's it!