

of this supposed counterculture stems not so much from 12 years of Reagan and Bush as it does from parents who didn't loan out the car keys last weekend.

Several years ago the music industry decided young fans should do its political bidding. As a result, record companies began to fund organizations like Rock the Vote, which gets guitar heroes and video vamps to encourage 18-to-24-year-olds to vote. Proponents of the movement point to the declining numbers of young people participating in elections and, in a bit of Jerry Brown-style logic, suggest that "the system" is rigged to exclude them. If only more young people visited the polls, they assume, oppressive censorship movements would halt. Rock the Vote showcases these sentiments in its literature and frets over "the relentless attacks on freedom of speech and artistic expression."

Before I had even passed through the Lollapalooza ticket gate, I encountered evidence of such paranoia. I had borrowed a friend's car for the day, and after locking it up and walking away, I decided that I had better jot down the license plate number in case of a problem. As I recorded the information, a fellow with long hair standing two cars away gave me a dazed but suspicious look and asked his friend, "Do you think he's a narc?"

There were not any narcs at the festival, so far as I could tell. The aroma of cannabis floated everywhere. The goods were offered to me twice, unsolicited. During a song by the Jesus and Mary Chain, a shirtless, heavily tattooed man followed by two kids no older than 16 stumbled aimlessly through the crowd holding a quickly made placard that read "Will pay for acid."

Although the drug trade resembled an unrestrained free market, every other form of commerce was controlled in a way that blended the ingenuity of capitalism with the inefficiency of socialism. Take the food vendors. At a day-long event, they were obviously of great importance, especially since the security guards would not permit anybody to enter the park with food. Once through the gates, big signs bearing the Pepsi logo sprang up everywhere: "AVOID LONG LINES. BUY FOOD AND DRINK TICKETS IN BULK NOW." Under this system, you stand in one line to buy food tickets for a dollar apiece, and then you stand in another line if you

want hot dogs, still another for watermelon wedges, and yet another for Pepsi. There is something ridiculously appropriate about this scheme, plotted by million-dollar musicians who combined with their business sponsors to endorse at least implicitly the idea of government expanding its influence into all spheres of life, save rock songs. After one irate woman's daunting encounter with this strangeness—no doubt the closest thing to bread lines that she had ever experienced—she got a clue, held up a slice of Domino's pizza, and declared, "This ain't Lollapalooza! This is [expletive] corporate America taking over our minds!" Everyone ignored her.

Undereath the same tent as the food were the various radical political groups so far removed from the mainstream as to render themselves harmless. Concertgoers examined their displays primarily during set changes and felt really good about themselves afterwards. "I visited the booths to achieve consciousness," noted one woman.

Collectibles were hot items under the political tent, and they promoted causes like animal rights (sticker: "Liberate laboratory animals"), Indian reparations (T-shirt: "500 Years of Genocide is Enough"), and communism (poster: "Phony communism is dead . . . Long live real communism"). One button pleaded for "McGovern in '92." Voter registration efforts, according to a worker at Rock the Vote's table, were going wonderfully. Everybody I spoke with was either too young to vote or already registered.

Attentions throughout the day were focused mostly on the stage, where the bands played and occasionally felt compelled to inform the audience that censorship is bad. Soundgarden's Chris Cornell was so moved by this oratory that he led his group through Ice-T's "Cop Killer," the ditty recently assailed from all corners and nearly responsible for a boycott of Time-Warner products. Cornell introduced the song by saying, "We don't play this song because of what it's about, but for what it stands for," as if there were a difference. Ice Cube, the show's sole rapper, later chimed in by remarking, "Records don't kill people, cops do. They shouldn't ban 'Cop Killer,' they should ban killer cops!" Nobody mentioned that four of the seven Lollapalooza bands are signed to the Time-Warner family.

I left the concert during a set by the

Red Hot Chili Peppers, the last band to perform. Big plastic spring-water bottles, emptied of their contents, covered much of the slippery ground—there were no recycling bins. After the Greens under the tent had started packing up, the only visible concern for any kind of environmentalism at all displayed itself on another large Pepsi sign placed near the park's entrance: "EXPOSURE TO SOUND ENVIRONMENT MAY CAUSE HEARING IMPAREMENT [sic]."

John J. Miller is a reporter for the New Republic.

Rock Music Lives On

by Brian Doherty

Just Keep Uncle Sam Away

Camille Paglia, current official Court Enemy of America's East Coast intellectual mafia, recently went on record in the *New York Times* encouraging federal support of the allegedly endangered American art form of rock music. She is correct in praising rock as one of American folk art's grand contributions to world culture. Rock is definitively American, from its myths (Elvis the simple country boy shakes the world, sprouting from a recording he made to please his momma) to its sound (a loving and chaotic meld of country folk, citified black rhythm 'n' blues, and the Tin Pan Alley stylings of urban, mostly Jewish, immigrants). Where she goes wrong is in attempting to subsume all value under the political, and then, of course, the federal. It does not follow from rock's value that it deserves, needs, or would benefit from federal arts funding. It is, in fact, rock's unique status as an indigenous American folk art that makes it important enough to protect from the enervating tentacles of government funding and from all the control, centralization, and elitism it implies.

Paglia couches her praise for rock in terms that show she has little understanding of its wide aesthetic range (romanticism is all she sees with her hormone-addled eyes; and while that's certainly a part of it, rock is perfectly ca-

pable of being classical, naturalistic, or Dadaist, to pick a random handful of other "literary" approaches) or of the history of the business. She seems unaware of just how and in what ways rock remains great or of all the ways in which her suggestion would ruin it.

In nearly every American city of any size, particularly in college towns where late adolescents congregate in great number and small space, is a plethora of individuals keeping the American folk art of rock alive. The best rock being made today is done on the local level, produced by small labels that issue music on the supposedly "dead" format of the traditional 7-inch vinyl record. The 7-inch vinyl is a totemistic gesture of independence from the exigencies of technological change forced by corporate decisions. This music is spread by a distribution network that generally deals directly with independent small record shops around the country and an information network based on small-circulation, self-produced magazines that at their best should be the envy of any art form in their knowledge, wit, and liveliness. (The best of these publications, known as "fanzines," is *Conflict*, edited and almost entirely written by Gerard Cosloy, who is also co-owner of the small New York label Matador, which issues some of the best American rock.)

This lack of corporate or governmental centralism allows for a range of community sounds that can develop small and then add to the musical store of the nation and the world. The band Nirvana is an example. It was the surprise commercial success of 1991, hitting number one on both the album and the single charts after many industry pundits had declared that the traditional rock band was dead, buried by dance music, rap, and country. And it was nurtured by the local scene and sound of Seattle and its 7-inch-oriented label, Sub-Pop.

Nirvana grew out of a local community that reinforced and honed a distinctive sound (dirty, grungy, "garage"-y guitar rock with a beat more for leaping up and down than for dancing and lyrics bordering on the genuinely incoherent, even for rock-trained ears), which proved its appeal to the world at large in the success not only of Nirvana but also of Pearl Jam, Mudhoney, and Soundgarden, all of whom arose from the same town and scene.

In this example, the local community

served as a sort of farm league for major corporate labels, who have snapped up all the aforementioned bands and made them famous. But it doesn't always work out this way, and isn't meant to. Many town-centered sounds have never made the leap to international prominence, at least not directly. The black-humored and high-pitched machine scree of Chicago and its Touch & Go label, best exemplified by Big Black, never hit it big, though its sonic influence can still be felt in a later wave of bands, like industrial dance giant Ministry, who bought Touch & Go's small-circulation records and loved them. This is an old tradition in rock; it is said of the Velvet Underground, a late 60's band of sterling quality and no commercial success, that only two hundred people bought their records but that all two hundred later went on to form their own bands.

In some cases a town's scene explicitly discourages moving on to national success on a corporate level. Washington, D.C.'s Dischord label and its flagship band, Fugazi (formed by the ex-singer of Minor Threat, the archetypal early 80's American straight-edged hardcore band, which combined punishingly fast and simple rhythms and riffs with hortatory screams about clean, youthful living), make a policy of "Small is Beautiful." They sell their product at conspicuously low prices and refuse to play venues that don't admit all ages or that charge more than five dollars for admission. They are an example of enlightened local capitalism at its best and have managed to sell through their independent distribution system almost 100,000 copies of the most recent Fugazi LP.

The dominant musical style of the D.C. scene tends to be overly politically charged and musically formless. D.C. bands are less interested in providing a catchy, pleasurable tune than in creating an atmosphere of intensity, speed, and aggression. "I know this is politically correct / But it comes to you spiritually direct / An attempt to thoughtfully effect your way of thinking / That is if you believe in race / And that you were born in the right time or place / This is a bullet you cannot outrace / Your way of thinking" is a characteristic example of Fugazi's over-didactic approach to song lyrics.

Also in the D.C. area is the even lower-profile Teen Beat label, run by Mark Robinson, singer and guitarist for the

band Unrest, which is perhaps the finest example of the breadth of the best modern rock bands. Unrest is a cottage-industry satire of music-biz glitz and product orientation—it produces promotional coffee mugs and pens with catalog numbers and issues music in a dizzying array of cassette-only releases, LPs, and vinyl 7-inch records both on Teen Beat and on other labels sharing similar interests and approaches, like Olympia, Washington's K, and New York's Homestead. This music runs the gamut from the achingly sincere and lovely—an approach pioneered by the K label, whose flagship band Beat Happening defined a charming, clumsy, and yet ineffably gleeful and positive approach to pop music that has been aptly dubbed "love rock" because of its sweetness and lack of aggression, its simple, insistent rhythms and often singsongy, childish rhymes—to the jagged and harsh to the soporific (as on their latest LP, *Imperial f.f.r.r.*). And Robinson's lyrics achieve a sinuous suggestiveness (often dealing frankly yet adoringly with physical love) that is pop poetry of high achievement. From "I Do Believe You Are Blushing": "I do believe that you are blushing / Everything in your mind is coming / Why miss K I do believe you / I want to stick you gold and blue. . . . I do believe your eyes / Your face is glowing / I do believe your face / Waking up to your eyes. . . . What will they be like, like you? Incredible eyes / Incredible!"

For some genuine Americana, try Austin's Texas Instruments, so proud of its state that it adopted a name in the manner of an amateur sports squad. Its first two LPs were released by local label Rabid Cat, which has since gone out of business, as happens often in this cash-strapped mini-industry where labels are more often hobbies than ways to make a living. It now releases records on the Rockville label, a "house label" for the independent record distributor Dutch East from Long Island, New York. It's a rocking folk band, self-conscious grandsons of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, with a similar political sense of the people vs. a power structure that is always operating against their interests. In "Decade of Denial," after imagining a citizenry rising up against what he sees as the anti-liberty depredations of the Reagan years and big-government conservatism, the singer meets a man who says, "You're wrong, son / What you say

could never happen / You failed to mention such dissension / Would be ground down with an iron fist." Buchananites, take note.

At its best, this lively, bouncy, country-rooted rock touches mythic American roots. ("To say that I am lost is to tell the farmer he is tired / Or the wind that it is wise / Yeah, I know my own disguise," Texas Instruments sing on "Crammed Into Infinity.") But the band's masterpiece is probably "Little Black Sunrise," a tall-tale in which "a hapless young devil . . . impaled by his conscience" is brought to judgment before a mysterious tribunal for forgetting "his promise / To protect the Earth and hold up the sky." "Do you want to be human / Or some wild jungle beast on the prowl?" he is asked. "Do you want to take credit for the world that you see all around you? If not, then forget it, and no flood will be sent down to drown you."

When I saw the group play in Jacksonville, Florida, I was so enthused that I approached the musicians after the show to tell them that they had the best band I'd seen in years. They then put me on the guest list for the rest of their Florida shows, none of which I was able to make, unfortunately. These people are not making music for money; few bands on this level don't value enthusiastic listeners above cash.

But where rock works best as pure folk art is on a level even smaller than the aforementioned: in hometowns across the country, with bands you will never hear about unless you are lucky enough to live there or are an obsessive reader of fanzines, which are themselves generally only obtainable by reading *other* fanzines, which generally take the time to review and print addresses for their brethren.

My hometown, until recently, was the Southern college town of Gainesville, Florida, home of the University of Florida and surrounded by some of the state's most beautiful lakes and rivers. I spent five years immersed in its local rock music community as fan, performer, and critic and had many of the best musical experiences of my life watching young Americans fill the gaps in their spare time and in their lives in a "boring" town where fun had to be what you made it.

These people are not the spoon-fed, soulless consumers who, according to some, are enmeshed in corporate cul-

ture; the most prolific, talented, and creative musicians don't often buy records. *Pace* Ms. Paglia, Americans can still make their own entertainment and art, forged from their own interests and passions, without the aid or judgment of a committee of "patrons" with no interest or connection with the people by whom and for whom the music is made.

In Gainesville, even the smallest level of vinyl distribution is beyond most bands' means, especially as most of their performances are done entirely outside the cash nexus, at parties and in their own living rooms or practice warehouses. If the music is recorded for sale at all, it's on cassette tapes, made sometimes at home, sometimes for cheap in a local recording studio. The music often reflects local concerns (our town was suffering the presence of a serial murderer back in the fall of 1990, and at least two local bands, the Moles and Superior Gingerbread Factory, wrote wise and angry songs chronicling what it was like then and there for us—folk tradition at its finest) and is always cognizant of its

audience, the people dancing, smiling, staring, or walking away. There can be no ignoring your community and its desires at this level—unless, of course, you *want* to, which is noble as well. Bands such as Hazel Syllabus and the Bill Perry Orchestra in Gainesville made a point of following their own peculiar muse, regardless of whether or not they could retain large crowds. And they didn't ask for anyone else's money to support their whims; they just did what they wanted to do.

Gainesville's music scene has had some inklings of national success and exposure. Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, one of the more skilled and intelligent of the "big name" rock bands, are from Gainesville, and in the late 80's and early 90's some locals achieved national attention through releases on local vinyl (the bristling, exciting hard rock of Radon), on a national independent label (the elegant country/folk-rock of the Vulgar Boatmen), and even on a major-label sampler CD (the mannered art-pop of Aleka's Attic). But, as in other

LIBERAL ARTS



EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY

According to a story in the *Las Vegas Sun* last fall, a former athletic director at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, feared for his life while investigating the university's basketball program. On one occasion he was threatened by a convicted sports fixer, whose ties to UNLV basketball players led to the resignation of the team's coach. He reportedly also received a threat from someone who suggested he either "make peace" with a local restaurateur and UNLV booster or be killed.

cities, much of Gainesville's best music is played by bands—like Doldrums, Just Demigods, the Jeffersons, What Anne Likes—that exist for a moment in time for their community and then disappear. Their music, however, survives in the memories of the people who were there.

The best rock functions as a personal and local form of capitalism, living or dying either by its own stubborn will to exist or by its ability to win the attention and affection of an audience that intersects personally, artistically, and perhaps economically with the performers. But unlike the average capitalist venture, it doesn't need and doesn't always intend to make a profit at all. For the Darwinian laws of the marketplace serve rock as they serve no other art form, providing ecological niches both for dinosaurs like U2 and Guns n' Roses and for small, wily mammals like the labels and bands discussed above. And this marketplace produces a genuine folk art still in touch with the lives, demands, and interests of an audience that loves and is willing to support the music with its own cash (whether paying admission to a club or buying a tape or a record) or just with attention (when cramming into a house party).

Federal arts funding creates contempt for the audience-driven value of communication. Art funded by coercion doesn't have to appeal to any genuine human need, especially when even the possibly beneficial enlightened patronage of one person with taste and vision is replaced by elite cliques more concerned with fashion and position than with achievement. "Modern art"—federally supported—speaks by design to no one outside a self-satisfied, self-involved metropolitan elite surviving on all of our

dimes.

Paglia's op-ed was headlined "Endangered Rock." Rock is doing just fine, thank you. It is art, which already suffers federal largess, that should worry about disappearing. Indeed, for most Americans it already doesn't exist.

Brian Doherty writes from Washington, D.C.

The New Musical Order

by J.O. Tate

The Recorded Violin

In order to recycle the familiar repertory, the music industry must seek new markets through various gimmicks: celebrity status, special occasions, and even styles more familiar on the street than in the salon. Nigel Kennedy, the young English violinist, has recently made a hit of the Brahms Violin Concerto not because of his impressive skill and interesting interpretation, but because of his *mondo bizarro* image on his album cover. Gidon Kremer, older and more sophisticated, has long cultivated an eccentricity that is no pose, but rather the mark of a distinctive musical integrity. At the opposite extreme, even Midori's cloyingly sweet interviews and china-doll persona have not masked her virtuosity on the violin. But such remarkable individuals are quite exceptional in an international musical cul-

ture in which national as well as personal distinctions have been "blanded out" or processed into mush by the musical analogue of "global democracy" or the "New World Order."

Even the compact disc itself may be viewed as a hugely successful marketing ploy, necessitating somehow the duplication of a great deal of repertory if not of performing artists. What Theodor Adorno would say about it is only too obvious. But just as new generations of performers continue to converge in the middle of the road, the compact disc has become the vehicle for the revival of many a 78. What's old is new. An element of genuine individuality is restored, and the violin is redeemed just as the world before the Second and even the First World War is restored to us, repackaged and digitized and more necessary than ever.

The great names reappear on various labels: Jascha Heifetz on BMG/RCA; Mischa Elman on Pearl and Vanguard; Fritz Kreisler on Pearl and Music and Arts; Sir Yehudi Menuhin on EMI and Biddulph; Jacques Thibaud on the same; Bronislaw Huberman on Pearl and EMI; Joseph Szigeti on Pearl, Biddulph, and Vanguard; and others on other labels. The pursuit of each giant is a project—and an education—in itself, its own reward. But the long shadows cast by such heroic careers are in a sense distorting because they tend to restrict our sense of musical perspective to what may be merely idiosyncratic. A broader sense of musical style may be gained by attending to wider horizons.

As far as the violin is concerned, those horizons can be scanned today in an anthology that surveys the world of the violin from 1901 to 1939: *The Recorded Violin: The History of the Violin on Record*, Volumes I & II (three CDs each, Pearl BVA I & II, imported by KOCH International). The 110 items included on these six discs add up to over seven hours of playing time—time rescued from oblivion and intensified by revelations of beauty from lost worlds.

In this collection, the background of great careers is filled in. Perspective is supplied by the firm establishment of a broad view and historical sense, so that the modernizing brilliance of Jascha Heifetz—to take but one salient example—is not scanted but rather set firmly in context, with Heifetz represented solely by his 1917 recording of Henri Wieniawski's Scherzo-tarantella. Such a

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