

DOA TOURS EUROPE:

# Is there punk after music?

D.O.A., KNIGHTS OF A NEW CRUSADE, WEIGHT-watchers from hell, on tour in Europe; seven countries, 29 shows, six rough weeks. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

A tale of conflicting realities, an adventure that illuminated the current defects and limitations of the punk/hardcore scene and maybe stumbled over the roots of a new resistance culture.

by Ken Lester

An odd time of decay and regeneration.

Corpse-like is the best way to describe the punk scene in Britain. It has not disappeared, there are still a lot of committed people around, it is just not alive in any meaningful sense.

Leeds, Britanarchist performance poet Nick Toczek put together a show that included Mensi (of Angelic Upstarts) reading his poetry and singing working class folk songs, Spartacus R, an idiosyncratic Rasta one-man band; and the skinhead poet Seething Wells. It was an unexpected event that stirred up a lot of different

VANCOUVER BAND D.O.A. ABROAD: from left manager Ken Lester, roadie Paul Bris. L. Hed, technician Ian Stein and guitarist Dave Greg...



Punk has become a subgenre of the music industry, file under folk music (loud). What was once vital, rebellious and threatening is now comfortably protected under the umbrella of "music" and "style". Punk set out to destroy the edifice of corporate rock 'n Roll and is now just another tombstone in the music firmament.

Gigs at the semi-legendary 100 club, where D.O.A. played their first London date, are for the most part die-hard cult affairs, a self-limiting ritual for approximately dressed regulars. Punk is no longer an attitude or a challenge but a musical style, a discipline where deviation from the rules of the cult eliminates one from participating. Those who remain simply want to belong to something. It has become a loser's game offering diminishing returns and catering to bands still stuck in the rut.

The U.K. punk scene is no better and no worse than any of the other British trends. It simply represents the triumph of style over content, resulting in a lack of meaning and a visible degeneration. Those "punks" who tire of one style eventually drift over to the later, more sophisticated trends.

Even the CRASS followers, who should represent a more active, committed and articulate wing of the punk scene too often wear their anarchy A's and CRASS symbols as talismans indicating a moral superiority and distinctiveness from the unenlightened rabble. Unfortunately, the symbols do not translate into fresh or creative actions.

Against this daunting backdrop, D.O.A. did have some positive experiences. In the Northern city of

elements and started the punks jabbering.

Bristol hosted the best D.O.A. gig in the U.K. Organized as a benefit for the Vancouver Five by the Bristol Peace Centre, it took place in a church converted to a community hall and was liberally lubricated by the cheap local cider. The whole affair exuded a co-operative enthusiasm. The British Subhumanz (a great band who don't look like Xerox punks) played, as did Toxic Shock, a provocative feminist band. D.O.A. crashed at the Peace Centre amid wall to wall people and intoxicated debates between meat-eaters and Vegans (who neither eat nor use animal products) of the Animal Liberation Front just back from harassing a fox hunt. It was a day to learn and make friends.

D.O.A.'s second London gig was another benefit for the Five and Omori, a Japanese anarchist condemned to death in Japan. It took place at the Ambulance Centre, a large squat which had previously hosted M.D.C. and Crucifix. D.O.A. shared the stage with Happy End, a 15 piece revolutionary orchestra and a quick-witted poet named Michael Belbin. The co-op atmosphere, large size and flexibility was a foretaste of scenes to come in Continental Europe.

Continental vitality

On the continent, D.O.A. discovered more vitality in the punk/hardcore scene than they experienced in the U.K. This was partly due to the music's more recent acceptance and partly due to a generally higher social awareness there.

In Europe, D.O.A.'s gigs for the most part took place in the Youth

Centres, squats and Autonomy Centres, which are organized by their members. The Youth Centres, a number of which have obtained funding from local city administrations, serve as multi-faceted activity centres for a wide range of young people. They include not only performance spaces, but bars, restaurants, theatres, printing and silkscreening facilities, record and book stores, meeting rooms and places to crash. It is out of such centres that much of the European peace movement is organized. Without the Centres and the squats, D.O.A. would never have survived in Europe.

The Youth Centre atmosphere allowed a much broader mix of personalities to participate in the punk/hardcore scene. The rigidity of style was reduced, if not altogether eliminated.

In Holland, the only country to refuse the cruise missile (or at least delay U.S. deployment), where marijuana and hashish are legally sold, D.O.A. was lucky to hook up with the guys from Balthasar Gerhard Kommando, who lent equipment and provided places to stay. D.O.A. played two gigs in Amsterdam, one at the Paradiso, a huge hall, and the other at the city's largest remaining squat, Welinger.

In Copenhagen, D.O.A. played at the Youth Centre and the Saltlageret, a large nightlug affair. Accommodation was provided at a huge squatted apartment building. The people on the fifth floor had volunteered to look after D.O.A. and feed us in their large and efficient collective kitchen. Like the crew in Bristol, the people in Europe seemed open and eager to talk about issues. In fact a willingness to exchange information and experiences as well as an active participation in organizing events seemed an important and integrated part of multi-dimensional social activity, not just a comfortable means of escape or retreat from a hostile world.

Beginning in Holland and prevalent throughout Europe (except Yugoslavia and Italy) violence and confrontations between punk and skinhead factions became a significant problem at gigs. In some cities, notably in Northern Germany, it was impossible

to put on gigs. D.O.A. was forced to stop playing and referee battles in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Freiburg, Vienna and Berlin.

In West Berlin, the show was at Pankehollen, an immense factory converted into a cultural complex. Trouble started before the band arrived, when several hundred of the 8-900 people attending smashed in the windows, broke down the doors and expropriated the alcohol stocks. Amid this chaos a small group of Nazi skins infiltrated the concert. These people belonged to one of the many neo-Nazi organizations that are reviving in Germany, committed to Hitler's view of national socialism and the ascendancy of a pure German nation.

Punks beat Nazis

Just as D.O.A. took the stage, the Nazi skins began shooting Roman candles and flares into the crowd. When punks moved to eject them, the Nazis sprayed mace and began throwing rocks and debris into the general panic. Then they released smoke bombs and moved in an organized fashion towards the exits, chains and knives drawn.

They didn't get away without sustaining substantial damage as the punks are used to fighting police in Berlin and they quickly re-organized themselves for the counter attack. Many people ended up in hospital with serious injuries. Amid this madness D.O.A. performed. Not to have played would have rendered the neo-Nazi attack a success.

A lot of people wanted D.O.A. to denounce "skinheads" but the band (who themselves have had skinheads) felt the length or style of hair was not a basis for opposition to goon attacks. Many skins are as cool as any punks and to ostracize people for their hairstyle creates division where none exist. The gig at Pankehollen also illustrated some other dodgy aspects of the current hardcore/punk scene. While several hundred people breaking into a hall and drinking free beer shows some initiative and militancy, the whole effort seemed somewhat misplaced. The Pankehollen was a space controlled by artists and the

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...AND BACK HOME ON THE WEST COAST Dave, Dimwit, Joe and W Impy.





# D.O.A.

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people living there. The ticket price was not high, the beer was not over-priced, and there was no brutal security. In short, everything was being done as fairly and as close to the bone as possible. The short term gain and excitement of getting in and drunk for nothing is wasted when weighed against the consequences. The hall will no longer put on punk/hardcore concerts and the promoter (a fan) is broke. The collective energy needed to create this sad situation would have been better spent on a real enemy (one who might fight back.).

In contrast to the mindless violence and posing in the larger German cities, gigs in the smaller towns of southern Germany were extremely communal and energetic. A number of D.O.A.'s eleven German gigs took place in villages (pop.20-30,000), in Youth Centres where the kids would force the band into five encores, actually hurling them back onto the stage until they played some more. Then everyone would stagger off to a besotted after-party. These gigs, which were marginal affairs financially, had an intense spirit of participation from the locals, who supported each other and helped out with all aspects of the show, including paying more than their fair share to make the event happen. There were no fights between punks and skins, and all types of people from the villages would show up. It was face to face contact, all too rare in small North American communities, where punk gigs almost never occur.

## Yugoslavia, Italy

As the tour drew to a close, Yugoslavia and Italy proved to be the most surprising countries D.O.A. would visit. The scene in both countries was quite different from the rest of Europe. Very few of the people attending the shows had the punk style, yet a great many were knowledgeable about the punk/hardcore phenomenon, especially regarding the social implications.

Yugoslavia, a non-aligned socialist country, was quite a shock, since we had expected it to be a very restricted society. Instead we discovered a very active and public alternative scene. There were after-hours clubs, hardcore radio shows, fanzines, and best of all, a thriving cultural opposition to

the institutions and dictates of the state. D.O.A.'s concerts, attended by over 800 people a night, were not legal, the band had no working papers, yet the shows went ahead unimpeded even after the police found out we were in town.

The people D.O.A. met in Yugoslavia had a unique way of viewing their society. They do not like the U.S. or capitalism, with the exception of being awed by the glittering array of consumer possibilities. But they find the Yugoslavian system boring, its promise muted by a technocratic administration and a demobilized people.

As one of the more articulate punks explained, "On paper we live in an ideal, or at least, a very advanced society. We have worker's control of the means of production, collective administration and a relatively wide realm of freedom. But there is an inertia on the popular level. We want to create a society of adventure. We are striving for a revolutionary culture that engages the future. We want to get out from under a comfortable but rather boring materialism and take some chances."

## Cultured C.P.

In Italy it was significant that D.O.A. was allowed to play at a communist cultural centre. It was the first hardcore show ever presented there because the Italian Communist Party (now the largest party in Italy) has not made up its mind about punk. The "debate on punk" is still continuing within the party, an attempt to decide whether punk is just another example of decadent excrement thrust out from the decline of capitalism or a legitimate expression of youthful protest.

A lot of Italian bands, like Cheetah Chrome Mother Fuckers and Raw Power are bursting the traditional bounds of music in their country. They help put on shows, distribute records and 'zines, spreading the word with zeal and humour. They are trying to find a place for cultural struggle in a volatile society where the old categories of left and right are duking it out toe to toe. The music one plays in Italy makes a difference and one must be prepared to defend it.

At the D.O.A. gig, the promoters showed great concern over how the gig was put on. The ticket price was reasonable and after 1,000 people had paid (enough to pay D.O.A.'s guarantee and all other expenses) they let in another 1,000 people for free or donation. The stage set up was chaotic and under powered, but the spirit was exemplary.

The guys from Cheetah Chrome M.F. who travelled from Pisa and were added to the show at the last minute, refused to come in for free. They insisted on paying to help out the general effort. In the hall a literature and record table was set up along with two bars and a spaghetti restaurant.

The battle for popular culture in Italy has raged for ten years. Young people have demanded that culture of all types be priced realistically and that performers treat audiences fairly. They have enforced their demands militantly. There have been protests and riots at events such as the opening of the La Scala opera season to a concert by Lou Reed. On other fronts, punk events have become the staging area for attacks on police and political targets. People united with a purpose can be very effective in keeping the authorities off guard. The Italians know how to enjoy themselves with a cutting edge.

After touring Europe with D.O.A. it seems certain conclusions can be drawn about the effective demise of the punk/hardcore scene. The current scene in Europe and North America has been reduced to style and cult status. To continue doing things in the same way will result in diminishing personal, economic and social returns. To not recognize or ignore the facts will be a frustrating and demoralizing oversight. At the same time one could argue that a whole new terrain is about to open up.

## Alternative future

In North America we could be entering a period of opportunity where the experiences of people in Europe might be helpful. There are numerous directions to explore. One possibility might be the rock'n'roll sideshow that D.O.A. has been talking about. The idea would involve several diverse bands agreeing to tour together as a package for a period of time. On this tour artists in other cultural spheres would be included as part of the entourage and artists from the local scenes would be encouraged to participate. Video installations and

mobile hangings would be used to physically alter the standard performance space. Information of all types would accompany the tour including on-the-spot silkscreening, 'zines, books, indy records and paraphernalia. The tour would remain in each scene for a week of so, living and eating with locals creating an instant event and generating media attention. There could be an effort first to establish a viable touring circuit, secondly a reliable communication and information network and then a push to establish local youth centres. The spin-offs of such a concept would be increased awareness and revenue for a wide range of projects. It would also create an active environment which would allow many more people to participate and to define the scene, smashing the box we currently find ourselves in.

That's just one idea. What are we doing now? Where are we going?

A longer, unedited version of this article appears in the August 1984 issue of *Maximum Rock and Roll*, (#16), available for \$1.50 (USA) from PO Box 288, Berkeley, CA, 94701, USA.



"MISS INFORMED" parades through the streets of Santa Cruz, home of Miss America pageant.

# Beach law

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battling courts over the requirement that they wear stockings on the beach. The State hired beach censors to police the beaches and sew on material to correct any prohibited display of shoulders or legs.

Cross Your Heart Supporters argue that women's breasts are common as a business commodity, topless entertainment and photos for purchase.

They maintain that the discriminatory California law means, for example, that the breasts of women and girls are obscene, while those of men are not. Judges have ruled that

men's breasts are the norm and because women's are different, they must be concealed.

'Women's freedom, comfort and pleasure have long been denied. Women need a heightened sense of self-esteem so that we can combat sexism. If we can redefine our body image as we see fit, we can overcome the negative self-image we see presented everywhere. One way to do this, is to become aware of the wide variety of breasts—not just the siliconed, perfectly rounded, Barbie-doll version of a tit'.

More info on the bare breast fight from Cross Your Heart Support Network, PO Box 1729, Santa Cruz, CA, 95061, USA.