

Punk Funk Rock Pop

Patty Dean

In the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the creative explosion in Minnesota's thriving black and white rock music scenes expanded the state's cultural identity far beyond the shores of Lake Wobegone. This era witnessed the worldwide emergence of new and synthesized styles of popular music. Black music, particularly funk, vibrantly reflected social conditions, building on James Brown's declaration of disassociation: "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." Similarly, white punk rock thunderously denounced the status quo. A number of Minnesota bands formed in those years signed recording contracts with major labels:

Minneapolis skyline mural from First Avenue, the nightclub that hosted many of Minneapolis's popular black and white bands



Patty Dean, supervisory curator for museum collections at the Minnesota Historical Society, is combining two of her life's grand passions—music and social history—and writing a book on Minneapolis's black and white music scenes, circa 1975–85.

Prince and The Time (with Warner Bros. in 1978 and 1981, respectively); The Suburbs (with Mercury/Polygram in 1983); The Replacements (Sire, 1985); Hüsker Dü (Warner Bros., 1986); and Soul Asylum (A&M, 1988). In 1984 three of the top 10 releases listed in the *Village Voice's* highly regarded “Pazz & Jop” critics’ poll were Minnesota products: Prince’s “Purple Rain” was in the #2 spot, right behind Bruce Springsteen’s behemoth hit “Born in the U.S.A.”; “Let It Be” by The Replacements was slotted at #4, and Hüsker Dü’s “Zen Arcade” occupied #8. (Other bands represented were R.E.M., Tina Turner, and Los Lobos.)

The objects pictured on the following pages manifest the multiple facets of a musician’s life and work: their clothing, the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos, the venues and bands, and the fans. Recent gifts to the Minnesota Historical Society from members of the Suicide Commandos, Hüsker Dü, The Time, Soul Asylum, Babes in Toyland, the cofounders of the Minnesota Black Music Awards, and the legendary First Avenue/Seventh Street Entry clubs ensure that this vital and culturally significant period in Minnesota history will be preserved for the future.

T-shirt, Goofy’s Upper Deck

In 1982 the Upper Deck, a Minneapolis punk music club, opened on the second floor of Goofy’s, a blue-collar bar and strip joint on Second

Avenue North and Glenwood Avenue, now the site of a Target Center parking ramp. The club’s six-inch-high stage encouraged the physically intense audience-band interaction that was obligatory for this new, in-your-face music.

The new club commissioned Matt Feazell, an aspiring comic-book author and employee at nearby Shinder’s bookstore, to produce a cartoon for a t-shirt. Some of the figures are Minnesota musicians who played regularly at Goofy’s. Leading the charge is Curtiss A (rock and roller extraordinaire, renowned as the “dean of scream”); close behind is a bespectacled Pat Woods of Man Sized Action, wielding a microphone stand. The Hüsker Dü trio of Bob Mould playing his signature “Flying V” guitar, Greg Norton clutching his bass, and long-haired drummer Grant Hart brandishing drumsticks wear t-shirts with the band’s logo.

Feazell, now a Michigan cartoonist and *Cynicalman* comic author, remembers “seeing the Hüskers [at the Upper Deck]. . . and thinking what a remarkably good punk band they were.”¹ He also included renderings of fellow cartoonist David Roth of Minneapolis’s *Ferret Comix* and *Power for Living* fanzine (at the rear with his pet ferret on his shoulder) and Henry Rollins, the bare-chested frontman for the California band Black Flag.

The damaged instruments under the feet of this rabble foreshadowed



the “certifiable riot” that marred the three-day wake scheduled to mark the club’s closing in 1983.² Accounts of the evening of August 30 vary, but the music ended when a bouncer pulled the plug on local band Final Conflict. Approximately 100 frustrated fans, one smoke bomb, \$3,000 in damages, one dozen Minneapolis Police Department officers, one arrest, and one excessive-force complaint later, the Upper Deck was closed for good.

Guitar Pick Souvenir

Originally calling its music “underground,” the Suicide Commandos, Minnesota’s first punk band, was founded in 1974 by three friends: guitarist Chris Osgood, bass player

Steve Almaas, and drummer Dave Ahl. Osgood liked to play with white picks, which he used and gave away as souvenirs, because they were easier to find when he lost them on stage floors during his energetic performances. The emblazoned picks, manufactured by Ernie Ball of Santa Barbara, California, exemplified good fun and affability, a contrast to the aggression and discontent later associated with punk music.

Over the next four years the trio, augmented by lighting wizard Linda Hultquist, expanded its audiences from Minneapolis's Blitz Bar to New York City's pioneering rock club CBGB's, the Albert Lea Ice Arena, and Minneapolis's Uncle Sam's (renamed First Avenue in 1982). Before the band's demise in 1978, The Commandos recorded two LP's, an EP, and a single, enjoyed the adulation of an official fan club, and, with Minneapolis filmmaker Chuck Statler, made "Burn It Down," probably Minnesota's first music video.



Chris Osgood of the Suicide Commandos, opening for The Ramones at Kelly's Pub, St. Paul, July 1-2, 1977

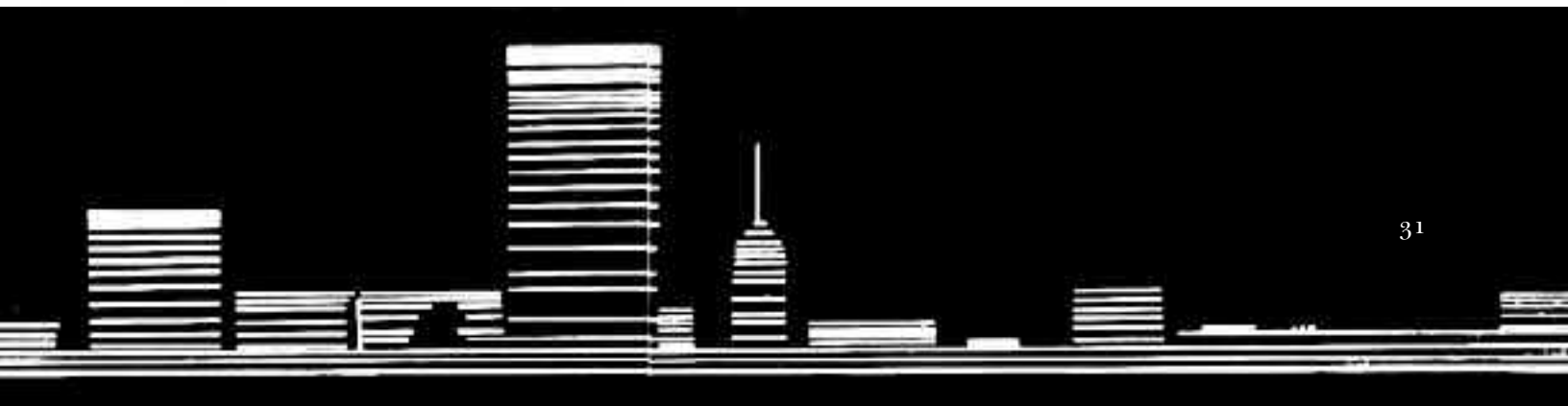
In addition to headlining at Jay's Longhorn, just off Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis, the Commandos also opened for international stars Iggy Pop and Patti Smith and toured with Pere Ubu. In July 1977, the Commandos opened at Kelly's Pub, St. Paul, for punk pioneers The Ramones: "The crowd did go berserk . . . [for] the Suicide Commandos. So much so that after their triumphant final set . . . people were hollering for the Commandos, even as The Ramones were mounting the stage. . . . Lead guitarist Chris Osgood, in teen heaven having shared the bill with The Ramones and held his own, was heard to remark that he shoulda just killed himself on stage, 'cause life just doesn't get any better."³

For the Fans, from the Fans

"Fan" is short for "fanatic," and Minneapolis bands—present and past—have had their share. The range of mementoes available for fans to purchase at concerts, on official websites, and at record shops has gone far beyond the common t-shirt silk-screened with a band's name and logo. And then there are the objects that fans make, either for themselves or as gifts to their favorite musicians.

The Hüsker Dü sign, made from a drawer front, was given to singer-drummer-songwriter Grant Hart in about 1984. Its reverse side wishes him "Happy 5th Anniversary!" and is signed by his friends.

Besides dissecting lyrics and coping guitar riffs, some fans spend



hours making and personalizing gifts for their favorite bands and musicians. A Boston woman in about 1993 recycled a Star Wars lunch box and thermos into a montage of punk rockers Soul Asylum, packed with photocopied photographs, backstage passes, in-jokes, and quips. For example, “BiL” refers to Bill Sullivan, the band’s road manager for eight years, and is a take-off on the logo for PiL, Public Image Ltd., formed by ex-Sex Pistol punk musician John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten) in 1978. Songwriter-singer-instrumentalist Dave Pirner’s t-shirt is decorated with the cover of *Ferret*, a 1982–89 Minneapolis comic that featured an interview with the band;⁴ on the thermos, Minneapolis’s famed Twin/Tone Record logo is superimposed on bass player Karl Mueller’s t-shirt. Between 1984 and 1989, Soul Asylum issued six releases on the Twin/Tone label.

The Boston fan also included several interview excerpts summarizing the band’s playful, devil-may-care attitude (“Beer’s the best. They have it everywhere and it goes good with sand and water”) and the link between fans and a band (“We still like best when we’re playing in a small room with everyone drinking. . . . We’re a bar band, basically”).

Fan mail to artists also frequently displays a personal, homemade touch. This December 7, 1985, letter, enclosed in a colorful, oversized envelope, thanked Soul Asylum



for playing in Chicago. The writer took pains to identify himself: “I was the one in the back of the van that didn’t say anything. I think I was sort of messed up.”

The iconic Hershey bar inspired giveaway items intended to promote releases by the R&B/funk band, The Time, and by punk rockers Soul Asylum. The Time’s members hailed originally from Grand Central and Flyte Tyme, mid-1970s basement bands that formed in the black neighborhoods of north and south Minneapolis and played at private parties and dances, VFW halls, the

Cozy Bar and Lounge, and, later, the Thunderbird Motel on the Interstate 494 strip in Bloomington. “Chocolate” was released as a single from *Pandemonium*, The Time’s 1990 album that reunited comedic singer Morris Day, guitarist Jesse Johnson, keyboardist Monte Moir (the sole white member), drummer Jellybean Johnson, “valet”-straight man Jerome Benton, and internationally renowned producers and songwriters Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

Like The Time, Soul Asylum was also formed from a teenaged neighborhood band, Loud Fast Rules,

which played at party houses, the Seventh Street Entry club in downtown Minneapolis, and VFW and Sons of Norway halls in the Twin Cities and beyond. *Candy from a Stranger* was the band's final release of new material on the Columbia/Sony label in 1998. The candy bar was coproduced by the label and Chicagoland Tower Records stores, probably as a promotion for the record's release.

Like many in the music business in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Soul Asylum helped to raise money to fight AIDS and encourage safe-sex practices. In 1993 the enterprising Ramses "Rockdoms" condoms were packaged to resemble tiny album covers for Soul Asylum's platinum release, *Grave Dancers Union*.

The sometimes contentious and stormy relationship among band mates is often described as being like a marriage or, perhaps, a family with competing siblings. It's apt that these paper napkins resemble those found at wedding receptions or anniversary parties. They commemorated the release of Hüsker Dü's *Candy Apple Grey*, the trio's first release on a major label, Warner Bros., and their sixth album within five years.

One of the most prolific and multifaceted performers of his generation, Minneapolis native Prince Rogers Nelson extended his notable energy beyond the usual fan offerings of souvenir t-shirts and baseball

hats. Jewelry, clocks and watches, temporary tattoos, holographic guitar picks, purses, scented oils and candles, phone cards, and self-published books were sold at his NPG (New Power Generation) boutiques in Uptown Minneapolis and the Mall of America and on the internet. Get Wild perfume, retailed by Paisley Park from 1995 to 1999, was promoted as the "first unisex fragrance designed exclusively for ♣️ by Paisley Park Fragrance Company."⁵ It originally sold for \$29.95. The graphics and his-her

scents reflect the flirty androgyny that Prince frequently incorporates in his appearance and music.

Do It Yourself Ethos

Popularly abbreviated "DIY," this principle is perhaps best seen in the printed materials that punk bands, fans, and labels created and distributed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With their photocopied, handmade appearance, the handbills, posters, and fanzines present an unapologetic, intentionally slapdash appearance that embodies the energy





and directness of punk music. Bands and record labels were not the only DIY enterprises in these predesktop-publishing days. 'Zines from the Minneapolis scene, including *Your Flesh* (cofounded by Ron Clark and Peter Davis), *Power for Living* (published and edited by David Roth), and *Uncle Fester* (edited by Jake Wisely) contained band interviews, record reviews, comics, and advertisements for DIY punk labels across the country.

The Replacements' drummer Chris Mars's ersatz "Merv Griffin Presents" poster for a 1983 show at Duffy's in south Minneapolis reflects the humorous contrariness that

pervaded the band's performances. Singer-guitarist Dave Pirner of Loud Fast Rules (later Soul Asylum) drew portraits of his band mates for their 1982 debut in the Entry at First Avenue; his self-portrait is an abstract tangle of lines and squiggles.

In Minnesota, the DIY ethos was perhaps most completely realized by Hüsker Dü. With friend and sound engineer Terry Katzman, they established their own label, Reflex Records, in 1980 as a "reflex" when Minneapolis's Twin/Tone rebuffed their first single. The design talent of singer-drummer Grant Hart also distinguished the trio from other Twin Cities punk bands. Hart made their

first poster in an industrial arts class at South St. Paul High School during his senior year in 1978. He used the printing block for Reflex Records, ca. 1981–85. The small Rockwell power-drill handbill probably advertised a free Tiger Night/Tuesday show at the Longhorn in 1979. Hart continued to do graphic work for the band, crediting it to his Fake Name Graphx.

Stage Clothes

How a performer chooses to dress onstage is often the most critical element of identity, next to the music itself. One artist's decision to wear street clothes is as deliberately self-expressive as another's choice to don an elaborately constructed, highly ornamented costume, accessorized from head to toe.

The Time was one of Minneapolis's most sartorially distinctive bands in the 1980s. According to Prince biographer Dave Hill, The Time's look had its roots in vintage clothing shops like Tatters, then located at Hennepin Avenue and Twenty-Fourth Street in Minneapolis. Proprietor Marc Luers recounted to Hill: "They were way ahead of the white kids. They just knew it: they knew the stuff, the double-breasted '50s and '40s suits. . . . They had to kind of show Monte [Moir, the sole white member] the way. . . . Back in 1980, no one even knew what pleated pants were. But these guys'd want them all."⁶ Moir's 1940s-style

fedora and Stacy Adams loafers completed the look. Stacy Adams shoes, manufactured in Brockton, Massachusetts, since 1875, have long been a choice of African American men wishing to present a hip or cool image.

The choice of footwear, on and off stage, was equally important to Soul Asylum bassist Karl Mueller.

His Converse All Star sneakers, or “Chuck Taylors,” are named after the Akron Firestones basketball player who publicized the shoe through basketball clinics in the 1920s. Now an American classic, these hightops have been worn by a wide array of artists (including Michelle Shocked, Snoop Dogg, The Cure, and The Ramones), probably as much for

their appearance as functionality. Converse gave this pair to Mueller, who wore them in performance, as the duct tape on the soles testifies.

While Hüsker Dü eschewed any pretensions at stylish dressing, the band’s sometime ragtag appearance still managed to provoke a reaction. One Boston fan remembers: “When they took the stage, the audience

Hüsker Dü’s Bob Mould, Greg Norton (in hat), and Grant Hart, preparing for their Today show broadcast, May 1987



thought some terrible mistake had been made. Three auto mechanics from the garage next door had apparently broken in and were impersonating a punk rock band: two unshaven fat guys and a bassist with a handlebar mustache." A British reporter once asked guitarist-singer Bob Mould why the musicians dressed as though they'd come "directly from some Midwest truck stop." Mould answered, "Everything that everyone wears is their uniform. This is my uniform, for better or worse. I'm a very pragmatic person. . . . I like to occupy myself with things that make me happy and interest me, and clothes are not high

on the agenda. I wear what I wear 'cos it dries out quickly, and I can hang it on a hanger every night."

Still, some of the Hüskers' clothing decisions (or non-decisions) became trademarks. Singer-drummer Grant Hart frequently played barefoot. A hat that bassist Greg Norton purchased in about 1984 from a St. Paul store specializing in Australian products became as much a part of his identity as his handlebar moustache. A national audience saw this most "un-punk" hat in the 1986 video "Don't Want to Know If You Are Lonely" and again when NBC's *Today* show broadcast a live performance from the south plaza at the

Hennepin Government Center on May 20, 1987.

Minneapolis Mural

This backlit mural of the Minneapolis skyline hung between the men's and women's rooms on the mezzanine of the First Avenue nightclub from about 1982 until April 2000, when it was replaced with an updated one. Freelance artists affixed tape to two panels of semi-opaque acrylic to render the Foshay Tower, IDS Center, and other downtown buildings. They then covered the surface of the two panels (which, together, measured 3.25 feet tall and just over 15 feet long) with black paint and removed the tape. The panels were screwed into a fluorescent-lit shadowbox.

Tour T-shirt

One of the essentials of rock and roll life (besides duct tape) is a commodious, reliable vehicle capable of ferrying sound equipment, instruments, and musicians from coast to coast and all points in between. In 1983 Soul Asylum bassist Karl Mueller sold the band's pickup and bought a second-hand Dodge van for \$500 in Detroit Lakes. Dave Pirner sketched his band mates as they appeared in the new conveyance, embarking on their first headliner tour to Madison, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City in 1984. The tour promoted their Twin/Tone release, "Say What You Will Clarence, Karl Sold the





Truck,” produced by Hüsker Dü’s Bob Mould.

And the Winner Is . . .

On May 12, 1982, the first Twin Cities Minneapolis St. Paul Black Musical Awards were presented at the Prom Center in St. Paul. The printed program announced the reason for the new awards: “So many times achievements are never acknowledged among our people. Yet encouragement is a key to inventiveness.” For the next 16 years, Minnesota Black

Music Awards founders Pete and Kimberly Bedell Rhodes spent thousands of hours nurturing and honoring musicians who played and taught jazz, gospel, R&B, and classical music. Though the MBMA began modestly, as the silver award certificate from the first ceremony shows, the Rhodes’s dream grew over the years. A local newspaper lauded the program as “a crucial showcase for local black performers” because “heavy-weight talent scouts” from major record labels attended. Prince won

numerous awards from the MBMA and was honored with the organization’s first Artist award in 1997.⁸

The Minnesota Music Awards, once known as the “Yammies,” were originally sponsored by *Sweet Potato*, a predecessor to the weekly newspaper *City Pages*. At the 1986 ceremony, Soul Asylum shared Best Garage Band honors with Hüsker Dü. The Clams’s guitarist Cindy Lawson McClellan recalled that Soul Asylum tipped the award over and used its concave acrylic surface as an ashtray for the remainder of the evening.⁹ Soul Asylum went on to garner international awards as well. In 1993 the band’s hit “Runaway Train” was voted the winner of the bear-shaped Rockbjornen award by readers of the Swedish publication *Aftonbladets*.

In 1987 Hüsker Dü won a Minnesota Music Award in the Cover Art category for Grant Hart’s color-saturated, abstract composition on the cover of *Candy Apple Grey*. Working at a Twin/Tone studio where the LP was recorded, Hart layered whole and broken glass of varying textures on a glass shelf. Over several days, he and Minneapolis photographer Daniel Corrigan “experimented with manipulation and distortion” through the placement of lights and minutes-long exposures.¹⁰

Jellybean’s Jacket

In the mid-1970s, Flyte Tyme was probably the Twin Cities’ major rival

to the Grand Central trio of Prince, Morris Day, and Andre Cymone. Terry Lewis (later of the Grammy-winning Flyte Tyme Productions), singer-saxophonist Cynthia Johnson (of later “Funkytown” fame), and drummer Jellybean Johnson were the core of this band, which sometimes numbered as many as ten people,

including a four-person horn section. Their ambition and DIY attitude was like that of their white contemporaries Hüsker Dü. According to Prince biographer Dave Hill, “They were a model of young, black self-organization. . . . They actually organized tours out of town, using their own ‘raggedy old bus’ to play

shows in Chicago and even Memphis.”¹¹ Jellybean Johnson, a graduate of Marshall High School, went on to play with The Time, and by 1984, when he wore this jacket in Prince’s film *Purple Rain*, he was a seasoned professional.



Without the originality and energy of these Minnesota bands, the current face of America’s youth-oriented pop music would be quite different. These artists’ innovations and do-it-yourself attitudes reflected particular values, paved the way for other artists, and influenced the national music scene. The Minnesota Historical Society is committed to documenting and recording this vital, creative part of our state’s history and continues to develop its music-related manuscript, artifact, and sound and visual collections. With the help and generosity so characteristic of Minnesota’s musicians and music-lovers, the Society is becoming the place to research the state’s music in its many forms. □

NOTES

1. Matt Feazell, email to author, June 6, 2001.
2. *City Pages*, Sept. 7, 1983, p. 1.
3. *Twin Cities Reader*, July 8, 1977, p. 9.
4. Roth later directed videos for Soul Asylum.
5. NPG mail-order catalog, n.p.,



Morris Day (upper left), William "Hollywood" Doughty, Andre Anderson (later Andre Cymone), and Linda Anderson (kneeling) in Grand Central, later Champagne, about 1975

1995, copy in author's possession.

6. Dave Hill, *Prince: A Pop Life* (New York: Harmony Books, 1989), 102–03.

7. See <http://www.thirdav.com/zinestuff/stargreen.html>; *Melody Maker*, Sept. 28, 1985, online at <http://www.melvillem.freeserve.co.uk/mmmm/HuskerDuMM9-85.htm>.

8. Minnesota Black Music Awards program, 1982, copy in MBMA Records, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul; *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, Sept. 26, 1986, p. 13C.

9. Cindy Lawson McClellan, interview with the author, Dec. 5, 2001, notes in MHS museum collections accession file.

10. Grant Hart, telephone interview with the author, Jan. 28, 2002; Daniel Corrigan, telephone interview with the author, Jan. 29, 2002.

11. Hill, *Prince*, 20–22.

The Upper Deck t-shirt, Loud Fast Rules/Soul Asylum items, Reflex Records Benefit handbill, and all but the Hüsker Dü items in the collage, p. 33, were donated to MHS collections by Karl H. Mueller; all Hüsker Dü items are from Greg Norton; the Minnesota Black Music Awards are the gift of Pete and Kimberly Bedell Rhodes; the guitar pick is the gift of Chris Osgood; the Stacy Adams shoes, The Time candy bar, and fedora are from Monte J. Moir; the suit jacket was donated by Jellybean Johnson; and the First Avenue mural was donated by The Committee, Inc. The Get Wild perfume was a museum collections purchase. All color photography by Peter Latner/MHS.

The photo on p. 31 (detail, p. 29) is by mmarkos/image dump: www2.bitstream.net/~imgdump; p. 35 is by Daniel Corrigan; and p. 38, from the MHS collections, is by Charles Chamblis.



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