

HARDCORE: THE OTHER '80s

American Hardcore

(Sony Pictures Classics)

★ ★ ★ ★

Bad Brains Live At CBGB 1982

DVD

(MVD Visual)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

As the Jimmy Carter '70s petered out and the Ronald Reagan '80s descended upon America like a biblical plague, there wasn't much going on in this country as far as good music was concerned. If you turned on the radio, you were likely to be assaulted by the saccharine blubbery of Kim Carnes, Christopher Cross or Barbra Streisand. New wave, punk rock's socially acceptable cousin, was a gargantuan pile of crap.

Disco was about to reinvent itself in the form of the biggest-selling album in history, Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, and MTV would soon arrive, destroying music completely for the rest of the decade. It was in that brief time span, roughly 1980 to 1986, that hardcore punk would germinate, ripen and rot.

A faster, more belligerent form of punk, hardcore eschewed the fashion poseurs of the late '70s British punk scene for a more militantly purist sound and vision. The music was so aggressive that it never got airplay outside of



college radio, and the records themselves were pressed in limited quantities and sold via mail order or independent record stores. The big music magazines of the day ignored it completely. "Normal people did not listen to hardcore," says Vic Bondi of Articles Of Faith, "and we liked it that way."

Writer Steven Blush gave hardcore a proper eulogy with his book *American Hardcore* (Feral House, 2001), and has now, with director Paul Rachman, brought the story to the screen in a documentary of the same name. Most of the key players are interviewed—Greg Ginn, Ian MacKaye, HR, Joey Shithead, et al. Internal legal battles within both the Dead Kennedys and the Misfits made it impossible for either band to be included. Regardless of these omissions, *American Hardcore* masterfully chronicles this oft-forgotten genre.

Christmas week 1982, Bad Brains played a series of shows at CBGB that were meant to be their "goodbye" to hardcore. The plan was that this band of black Washington, D.C.-native punks-turned-Rastafarians would follow Jah's calling to its logical conclusion and reform as an all-reggae outfit called Zion Train. That never materialized, but Bad Brains did take the first of what would be several hiatuses throughout their career. *Live At CBGB 1982* captures Bad Brains at a point in their career when they were, quite simply, the best band on the planet.

Despite the far-reaching influence of bands like Black Flag, Minor Threat, Bad Brains and the Dead Kennedys, no one ever made so much as a comfortable living playing hardcore. It was a scene that went from birth to death in total uncommercial purity. There's nothing to compare it to these days, and for that reason alone, these two movies are essential viewing.—Chris Simunek

ROBERTA PRICE

Huerfano: A Memoir Of Life In The Counterculture

(University of Massachusetts Press)

★ ★ ★ ★

Road map and cautionary tale, *Huerfano*, Roberta Price's memoir of commune life from 1970 through



1977 in the Huerfano Valley of southern Colorado, is beautifully written and brutally honest. "Huerfano" translates as "orphan valley," a perfect metaphor for a place inhabited by young people who were betrayed by the American dream and exchanged goose-stepping for goat herding. Price is a true believer who doesn't shy away from calling pig shit—including the variety shoveled by burnt-out flower children—by its name.

In 1970, Price and husband David Perkins left academia and joined fellow freaks at a commune called Libre. With few skills and after a scratchy start, they taught themselves how to survive the splendid glory and wicked temper of Mother Nature. They built a home (very, very slowly), got high (many, many times) and endured polyamory and death. It was no simple task to create a new society founded on Marxist verities and using only a pickax, but Price and her fellow comunards managed to do so, if only temporarily.

Price is part poet ("We're not unaware how pleasure is heightened by impossibilities," she writes), part storyteller (the anecdote of cowboys unknowingly eating marijuana doughnuts is hysterical) and part sensualist (that's not marjoram the apparently naked author holds on the cover). Through her naive idealism emerged a tough realist who recognizes a silver lining. "Unbridled possibilities are what we saw in the Huerfano, and what we took away." This is a timeless lesson, especially resonant in this era of gloom.

—Michael Simmons

BEACH BOYS

Pet Sounds

40th Anniversary CD + DVD

(Capitol)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If you're like me and Paul McCartney and think that *Pet Sounds* is one of the best albums ever recorded, then there's no need to read this review—you're going to buy this CD/DVD anyway.

The CD contains both a mono and stereo mix of the album with the bonus track "Hang On To Your Ego." The DVD features "The Making Of *Pet Sounds*," including interviews with Brian Wilson, Mike Love, Al Jardine, Dennis Wilson, Carl Wilson, Bruce Johnston and Tony Asher. There's also "Pet Stories," which is more of the same, with some cool interviews with the musicians who played on the album, and "Rhythm Of Life," which starts off with Sir George Martin driving a red Cadillac convertible on his way to visit Brian Wilson in California and then follows the two as they listen to and examine the recordings together. Sir George attempts to get to the bottom of Brian Wilson's genius, trying to find out how and where Wilson came up with all those brilliant sounds. Brian explains that it all comes from a higher power, straight from the heart.

Also included on the DVD are three 1966 promo films and a photo gallery filled with the Beach Boys doing goofy stuff for the camera in true '60s style while the music plays. There will also be a limited-edition bicolored vinyl release of this set.

All in all, there's nothing really new revealed here. This is definitely fan stuff, a must-have for some but unnecessary for those who don't understand.—Michael Wildwood



MASTODON

Blood Mountain

(Reprise/Relapse)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Depending on whom you ask, Atlanta's Mastodon are either the saviors of modern math metal or the natural successors to Iron Maiden's grandiose throne. Both brutal and sophisticated at once, their third full-length album, *Blood Mountain*, has already received universal praise extending from Ozzfest rejects to the *New York Times*.

Sure, *Blood Mountain* might be a bona fide soaring epic, but how does it sound *on weed*? Even fuckin' better. Guitarists Bill Kelliher and Brent Hinds have a propensity for unfurling massive guitar riffs that are meaty, catchy and unrelenting; this only inspires drummer Brann Dailor to play pulverizing, complex patterns to counterbalance their efforts. These attributes, combined with Mastodon's trademark abstract lyrics, are made even more majestic and easier to get lost in if you first partake in Strawberry Cough. Tracks like "Capillarian Crest," "Hunters Of The Sky" and "Circle Of Cysquatch" come alive, evoking fantastical reveries akin to psychedelic Dungeons & Dragons adventures starring Conan the Barbarian.

If you decide to fully critically assess *Blood Mountain* under the influence, be sure to juxtapose the Paul Romano-illustrated "earth" imagery with his work on Mastodon's two prior element-themed albums, 2002's *Remission* ("fire") and 2004's *Leviathan* ("water"). Though it won't fully explain their lofty concepts, the art will give you something to pore over while Mastodon's music—and hopefully some good herb—elevate your senses.—Zena Tsarfin

