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GRANT HART— INTOLERANCE

Released 1989 on SST
Reviewed by [Dog 3000](#), 15/03/2005ce

side 1
All Of My Senses
Now That You Know Me
Fanfare in D Major (Come Come)
The Main

side 2
Twenty-Five Forty-One
Roller Rink
You're The Victim
Anything
She Can See The Angels Coming
Reprise

Grant Hart is of course best known as the drummer / co-leader of super-influential 80's punk power trio Husker Du. When the band broke up in early 1988, Bob Mould launched a rather successful solo career (MTV airplay, major label contract) while Hart labored on in indie obscurity. (Bassist Greg Norton had a band called Grey Area for awhile, but they never released any recordings and apparently he works as a chef these days.)

Grant's first post-Husker outing was recorded for SST, the legendary American punk label that Husker Du had recorded for from 1983 until their jump to the majors in 1986, but the label was beginning to fall on hard times by that point and the "grunge" thing was still two or three years away. After this record (on which he apparently played ALL the instruments) he formed a proper band called Nova Mob who released a couple of decent indie-rock records that failed to have much impact. It's a shame, because Grant Hart was an equal to Bob Mould in terms of

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NOV 2009



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THE SILENT CORNER AND THE LITTLE GIRL / PARAPHRENIA PRAECOX
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singing and songwriting and as co-producer of all the classic Husker albums he was unarguably a very influential figure on the whole 80's indie scene and especially the early 90's when that scene was commercialized into a full-blown fad.

In an understandable reaction to 9 years of relentless touring playing full-blast maximum rocknroll, both Hart and Mould turned down the volume for their debut outings and produced records that stay as far away as possible from the whiplash guitar assault they had become known for. Mould's "Workbook" is pretty well known, as mentioned earlier it was well-publicized and promoted and probably sold more copies than both of Husker's major label LP's combined. However the relatively obscure "Intolerance" is actually the better record if you ask me, Hart's tunes and singing always struck me as more soulful and warm-hearted than Bob's bitter soul-baring approach. But what they had in common (and what made Husker Du such a great great band) is that as songwriters both had an unusually confessional and emotional approach for so-called "PUNK ROCK" which as a genre has tended to be "outré-nihilist" and rather macho.

And so "Intolerance" begins not with buzzing electric guitars or the spastic pitter patter of Grant's drum kit but with icy keyboards evoking something between "Positively 4th Street" and New Order. The croaking just-fell-outta-bed lead vocal insists "I'm using all of my senses, I am" while in the background a chorus of Grants chants "Pullin' a plow, pullin' a plow and I don't know how!" What does it mean? Honestly I have no idea what most of his songs are about on any conscious level, but even though the lyrics to his tunes are of such a personal nature the raw feeling translates well enough (another Dylan comparison might be apt here, yaa and they're both from Minnesota dere hey!) Indeed this particular album is one of the most intensely personal, intimate, "interior" records I can think of -- one definitely gets the sense that he made this record all by himself, alone intentionally, as a sort of therapy (and he did have a lot of personal issues to work out at this time -- he was trying to kick heroin and also believed he was HIV+, though later it turned out to be a false test result.)

"Now That You Know Me" is a more explicitly relationship-oriented song, and even more explicitly Dylanesque with a rollicking pop-r&b groove and harmonica. It's about opening yourself up to someone, and like all the "relationship songs" on this record one can speculate that it is about a lover, a former bandmate, or none of the above. (A Husker Du version of this song appeared on the posthumous live CD "The Living End.")

"Fanfare in D Major (Come Come)" is the real stunner on the first side, driven by dynamic tympani-style drumming and a feverishly sawing string section. This might be what the Velvets' "Heroin" would have sounded like had that song been about uppers instead of downers. Again I don't know what he's singing about, but it sounds great and ecstaticly goes straight to the heart.

"The Main" is a sea shanty ballad kinda thing, instrumentally dominated by Grant's lone piano and a thundering overdubbed vocal chorus. It sounds like it should be about a boat but it's probably about drug addiction. "The main, the main -- remember your name!"

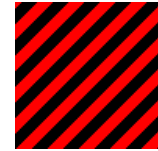
Side two begins with the titular tune from an EP Grant had earlier released (with a non-LP cover of Love's "Signed DC" on the flip side, a tragically perfect song for Grant to sing.) Though everyone assumed at the time this song was about the breakup of Husker Du, "Twenty-Five Forty-One" was in fact the street number of a house where Grant had lived with an ex-lover, and is about the breakup of that relationship. It was only after recording the song that he realized that Husker Du had ALSO had an office with that very same street number, and indeed the sense of melancholy at leaving a once comfortable home behind to face an unknown future fits perfectly with both scenarios. Musically, it's quite catchy & rockin' (was written for Husker Du circa "Flip Your Wig" in fact) and Hart's soulful wailing of the repeated chorus at the end is a truly beautiful moment, damn near Van Morrison territory. The open-hearted resignation of that simple chorus ("twenty-five forty-one



SONIC YOUTH
THE DESTROYED ROOM
THE GIN



SPOOKY TOOTH
THE MIRROR
PETEW



THE DEAD C
THE OPERATION OF THE SONNE ATTIC DEMONSTRATION

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/ big windows to let in the sun") sure contrasts strongly to the bitterness of Mould's notorious post-Husker breakup song, "Poison Years."*

"Roller Rink" is the only bit of filler on the record, a throwaway instrumental with a roller-rink organ sound, hence the title.

"You're The Victim" is yet another outstanding song, which may or may not be about an ex-lover and/or Bob Mould. Glasses clink as part of the percussion track, adding to a boozy easy-listening vibe as Grant slurs and whimpers that in spite of "all those little things you do to hurt me" that indeed "you are the victim, yes you are." It's the kind of song you need to hear to lift your spirits when you're sobbing drunk and feeling all alone. (Some levity in the arrangement too, which features a pretty whistling solo during the bridge and ends with the sound of a dentist's drill!)

For "Anything" Grant boasts of climbing mountains in his sleep, standing in line (because "it stood to reason"), and even setting his truck on fire. Again, I don't know WHY he's doing all these desperate things (or why the background chorus is singing "The Girl Can't Help It") but it rocks my soul and I am right there with him every second.

"She Can See The Angels Coming" is a ballad/dirge kinda thing, with oceanic slo-motion cymbal swooshes and droning organ. It's probably about a dying girl, which seems to be a recurring theme in his songs ("Diane" and "Pink Turns To Blue" jump immediately to mind.) Don't ask me why (unless maybe these girls represent Grant himself?)

The "Reprise" is a minute or two of clanking and droning that sounds a lot like early Amon Duul III! (And it's not even that apparent which of his songs this is meant to be a "reprise" of.)

In retrospect this LP seems a sort of last gasp before this great Unsung songsmith disappeared into obscurity, which I admit may say more about my having lost touch with his career than the quality of his recent work. But then again, each album he did seemed to come out on an even smaller and more obscure label, and get less and less notice in the music press . . . while at the same time Bob Mould was fast becoming an icon of the latest industry-driven pop music fad, so-called "alternative rock."

But then the committed "artists" always seem to come in second to the guys who are good at "marketing", don't they? I haven't felt the urge to put on a Bob Mould record since I can't remember when, but I regularly find myself returning to this mysterious and profound little gem of an album.

* An illustrative quote from Grant in Spin magazine 1989:

"Y'know, if 'unreliable' meant not showing up at the office, not writing songs, not playing extremely well, then no, I was NOT unreliable. If unreliable meant having dissatisfaction with the way that the label wanted to push us, in the commercial goals of Bob Mould and his outfitting of Greg Norton as an equal third member as far as songwriting was concerned, then yes, I guess I was unreliable, because I couldn't be depended on to assist with other people's goals. . . It was like [Bob's songs] sounded--I hate to say it-- they were square! And in some sense, it might have broadened us with the REM crowd, or whatever crowd, as far as getting that appeal. But it did nothing for me."

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