



THIS WEEK: *Bottle Rocket* ...



INTERVIEW

If Grant Hart needs a year to find the right third verse for a song, he's going to take it

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By Jen Girdish December 29, 2009

It's been 22 years since Grant Hart was the barefoot drummer in the influential hardcore band Hüsker Dü, but stories of being "the wild one" have followed him well into his solo career. His rumored abuse of heroin and a tangled conflict with bandmate Bob Mould always lingered as part of his image. But the 48-year-old Hart is hardly the drug-addled singer-songwriter who wrote "The Girl Who Lives On Heaven Hill" and "Turn On The News"; these days, he prefers to take 10-year respites between albums and tour with just a guitar and an amp. Prior to [his show Dec. 31 at Station 4 with The Rembrandts' Phil Solem](#), *The A.V. Club* spoke to Hart about his new release, *Hot Wax*, bands that have their midlife crises in public, and why he's glad it's not 1985.

The A.V. Club: This is the first time you're traveling on tour with a cell phone?

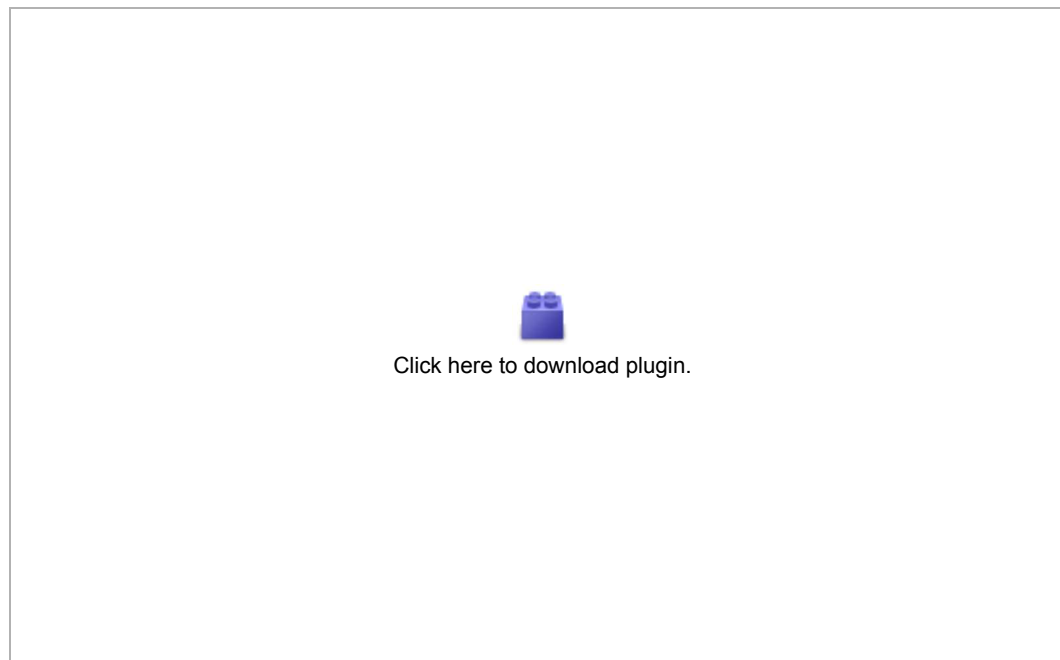
Grant Hart: I'm not a tech fan. I don't get that charge that comes from having the new little gizmo in your pocket. Maybe I'm a dinosaur. There's nothing battery-operated that will help me write songs any differently from the way I've done it for years. Maybe there's something that can document an idea quicker, but pen and paper have always been pretty handy for

AVC: Why the 10-year hiatus between *Good News For Modern Man* and *Hot Wax*?

GH: I've delved into a lot of non-musical projects. Learning new things and accomplishing things with my hands that I put aside as an adult to devote all my time to music. As I've gotten older, I've been concentrating on quality and no filler, and spending more time constructing all of the parts of music, rather than going into the studio with one or two parts and then letting the rest work itself out. The first song, "You're The Reflection Of The Moon On The Water," I took a year to come up with what I thought was an appropriate third verse. That's a long time to hold back on a song that you're excited about in order to make it more of a fulfilling experience. Would I have taken that opportunity in 1985? Hell no.

AVC: You've taken some really long leaps between all of your solo albums. How different does the process become?

GH: I have a lot of dislike for the business end of the music business, particularly what they call shopping for a label. It can be a real stupid thing. It should be plain and simple. There's a percentage that should go to the artist. It's like planning a trip to the grocery store. But a lot of times now, especially with smaller labels believe it or not, they want to get involved and to be more controlling than I'd ever even heard of from Warner Bros. Warner put money in the account and received the final product and said they liked it. Whereas, some of the labels I've talked to over the past four years, they'll hear a couple of finished tracks and ask when the rest of the demo's going to be finished. And I'm like, "Okay, I'll talk to you later." Maybe that reflects on me more than anything. That is one place that I don't want to make compromises. I want my little silly jokes to be told with the correct punch line, and I'm satisfied trading off the immediacy to fulfill the detailed work of the artistic end of things.



AVC: What do you think of the reunion tour trend? Pixies, The Police, Velvet Underground?

GH: I think a lot of people are having their midlife crisis in public. I think if you left something unfinished, go ahead and do it. But I guess I can't really answer that question in respect to my own music, because it's inconceivable. I can only visualize one situation. Somehow we were doing a hell of a lot of good for something that was very important by the act of getting on stage and performing together. People assume that the difficulty would be me, Greg, and Bob occupying the same stage together, because people like to play chess with him and me as opposing teams. People love a conflict. Artistic conflict is not like that at all. It's just wanting your own space, it's not wanting what the other person has. And we dissolved at a good time—we were very close to the top of our game.

AVC: Have you heard any stories about yourself that have no basis in reality?

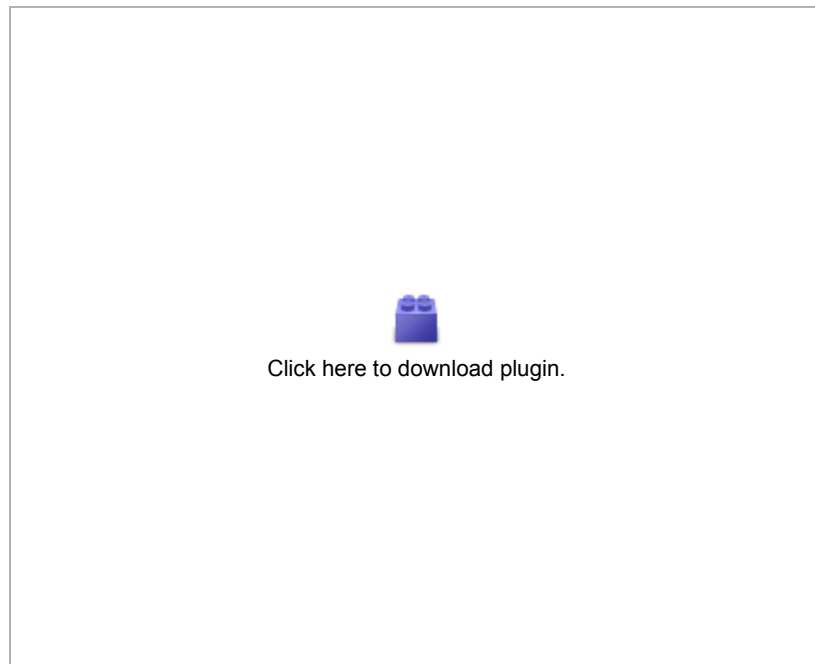
GH: God, I've heard heinous and destructive things. Like, coming into a record company offices and threatening people. Just unbelievable garbage. If they're going to make up something, why don't they make up something flattering? [Laughs.] The conflict that there has been—and I can't really describe the relationship as one of conflict now—but the conflict that existed has been exaggerated by certain articles. The editor has a certain angle and does a hatchet job on one of us at the expense of another. It's like you can do a lot of damage to personal relationships by putting together a slanted piece of journalism. The person assumes that the other one took a more active role. Nowadays with all the blogs and things, I have heard more 1980s and 1986 stories in the last three months than I heard in the years between. People are recycling garbage journalism.

AVC: Is it possible that the conflict between you and Bob Mould pushed the band to be better?

GH: Well, if we would've acknowledged it, I can see where it would've been a lot more beneficial. There were times when it was most apparent to me on the *Warehouse* album, where the songs could've been given another 6 months to polish themselves a little bit. But we were going for quantity. We wanted to tell Warner Bros. that we're going to put out a double album and you've got to put it out because we've got you by the contract. I think that's one of the things that led to the destruction of the band. It was hubris. Instead of watching ourselves and what we were in control of, we were worried about other factors. Making that next step. I have no problem with the concept of financial riches, but if you need to change the person you are in order to achieve that, I think you're taking too much of a gamble with your personal happiness.

AVC: Do you think your fan base consists of a lot of nostalgic Hüsker Dü fans?

GH: I'm getting a lot of people under 30. I wouldn't want it to be a nostalgic thing. You go into a club now, and they're playing something that's 25 to 30 years old and it'll be, like, the hipster joint. "We're progressive, we're alternative." And it'll be like, "No—you're nostalgic." I always expect there to be a new counter-culture coming up, something that would make punk look as ridiculous as punk made the hippies look. Was it techno or hip-hop? I don't think so. They seem like sub-cultures, not counter-cultures. I long for a little Dadaist conflict between the most progressive arts and general society.



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