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Music Row: Music goes on for Grant Hart

By Brian Rademaekers

There is little denying the impact that the post-punk trio Hÿsker Dÿ had on rock 'n' roll in the '80s, a wave of influence that rubbed off not only on their peers but also on aspiring and successful bands in the decades to come.

Their formula, like most good formulas, was a simple one: harness the raw power of punk, tie in catchy songwriting, and rip it up onstage.

While they pioneered that brand of rock in the waning days of punk rock, others took notice. And while it might be true that Hÿsker Dÿ never rose much above cult status, bands ranging from Nirvana to the Yeah Yeah Yeahs owe them for blazing an inspiring trail.

They got their start in Minneapolis in 1979 when drummer Grant Hart teamed with guitarist Bob Mould and bassist Greg Norton. Throughout their career, which essentially ended in 1987, Hÿsker Dÿ's songwriting and lead-vocal duties were shared by Mould and Hart. In addition to that signature knack for crafting powerful pop, the trio was noted for an uncompromising dedication to keeping the music loud, audacious and raw.

Their early concerts were hard, fast blasts, with little time between songs, and the audiences were pulled into the blazing pace. That energy translated to albums like their early Everything Falls Apart and the critically acclaimed Zen Arcade - an album that showcased Mould and Hart as crafty songwriters. It was after 1985's Flip Your Wig - a clean, mean rock album that was as infectious as it was bold and unsparing - that they crossed from the underground to the big-time Warner Bros. label.

And while they continued to release acclaimed albums like Candy Apple Grey and Warehouse: Stories and Songs, the toll of drug addiction and a simmering rivalry between Mould and Hart was beginning to become apparent.

Within a year of Warehouse: Stories and Songs, Hÿsker Dÿ was deceased. But, as one might expect, both Mould and Hart have fashioned solo careers, and not without some bright spots. Mould did several solo albums before forming Sugar in the 1990s, and later went solo again.

For his part, Hart managed to beat the addictions that helped lead to the dissolution of Hÿsker Dÿ, but not before putting out the stellar EP 2541. He later formed Nova Mob, which saw his songwriting take on a mid-1970s Dylan aura showcased in fuzzier rock that downplayed the edge of Hÿsker Dÿ.

Their Last Day's of Pompeii, meant to be a science-fiction opera, was a weird, cool album with psychedelic trappings and solid rock grooves that displayed Hart's penchant for slow-building climaxes. That album also was the last to be released by Nova Mob. Two years later, Grant released the solo record Good News for Modern Man.

Despite more praise from a dedicated following, that 1999 release was the last one he'd release for a decade. In September, he came back in style with Hot Wax, which features members of God Speed You Black Emperor and Silver Mt. Zion. And, lest you think Hot Wax is merely a reference to the 180-gram vinyl this baby was released on, take a look at the cover, which depicts a flailing Icarus dropping from the Sun.

Apparently, the album contains an effort to blend rock-a-billy and Greek mythology. But Hÿsker Dÿ fans will also be pleased to know that Hot Wax also sees Hart return to some of the heavier, rawer tones of his youth. Perhaps that's to be expected, given the heavy hitters he recruited to record, but it is still invigorating.

It's You're a Reflection of the Moon is a searing punk-ish number, and Hart's passions flare through the buzzing guitars to give the song a palpable sense of pop.

It's a song where you can hear elements of the Pixies or Black Rebel Motorcyle Club; or maybe we were just hearing Hÿsker Dÿ in those bands all along.

Opening the evening is Philly's own Taggart.

Check it out . . .

Who: Grant Hart with members of Godspeed You Black Emperor and Silver Mt. Zion

What: One the primary songwriters behind the influential trio Hÿsker Dÿ

Where: World Cafe Live, upstairs

When: Thursday, Dec. 17, at 9 p.m.

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