

Early–Mid '80s



“It was so easy to freak people out in those days”: Early–Mid ’80s

The beginning of the ’80s saw the local Seattle music scene shift from bar bands that specialized in covers to original do-it-yourself punk bands, that built the Seattle punk scene up from scratch. And with unforgettable local performances by up-and-coming punk acts from outside of the area (Black Flag, DOA, etc.), the grunge fuse was officially lit.

TOM PRICE: Something I don’t see mentioned much — the violent reaction people had to you, just for being mildly punk rock. Every day, you’d be walking down the street, and people would yell “Faggot!” and throw beer bottles at you. You’d get jumped by frat boys or stoners. Everywhere you went, it was a daily occurrence. I’m forty-three now, I have a couple of kids, and it just seems so weird to me, to think how inured to violence I was. I’m not a real big guy — I was never a big fighter — but I was very good at putting on the stone face and ignoring them. And if they decided they were going to beat me up anyhow, I got good at running fast. I got good at appearing to be beaten up, but knowing how to protect myself, so I wasn’t really injured at all. For me, the exciting part was the music and all the great bands. But the daily tension and violence maybe added to it.

REGAN HAGAR: The cop stuff would all happen on Bainbridge. The Seattle stuff was more, “Big city cops — try to avoid them.” But on Bainbridge there were three cops. Everyone knew everyone’s names, so they’d see Andy and I

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in Winslow, pull over — “What are you guys doing? Let me see the bottom of your shoes, we just had some crimes.” It was just a chance to hassle us. A couple of times they would separate and handcuff us, and then let us go.

MARK ARM: I went to Linfield, a small college in McMinnville, Oregon, from '80 to '82. There were maybe four people who listened to punk rock and then there were maybe eight more sympathetic to new wave. Largely populated by cowboy jocks. One time, my friend and I cut our hair down to half an inch and dyed it. My bleach job turned out spotty, so it looked like I had leopard spots. We went into the cafeteria — this is a school with a population of 2,000 or less. The whole place fell completely silent and everybody just stared at us. I was at the Coke machine filling up my glass, and this football player who I lived down the hall from earlier in the year comes up to me and goes, “Devo, *I'm going to kill you.*” That's all they knew at that point, was Devo, so of course, I got called “Devo” by all these people. It was so easy to freak people out in those days.

CHARLES PETERSON: Ended up going to college at the University of Washington, and met Mark Arm in the dormitories there. [Mark] turned me on to underground American punk rock/post punk. At that point, it seemed what I really wanted to study was photography. Throughout junior high and high school, I'd been on the newspaper taking photos. My mother for my birthday and Christmas would always buy me these nice photo books. So it just seemed like something to do — go out, and photograph bands at the local clubs. And then quickly [it] turned out my friends had bands as well, and that they needed photographs.

BLAINE COOK: Lots of hall shows, lots of drugged and intoxicated people. Always violence, always senseless. Always senseless vandalism, and that's why [with] the hall shows, you could only do one or two at a certain hall — you'd get booted out.

DUFF MCKAGAN: Punk rock was a refuge for people that didn't fit in at school or on sports teams — punk rockers were the guys getting beat up by the jocks. By early '82, it was all the jocks from out in the suburbs shaving their heads, coming to gigs, and fighting.

TOM PRICE: Black Flag became popular, hardcore became popular. And all of sudden, people would show up — you'd see them around the University District one day, and then the next day, they'd be full-on Mohawk and leather jacket. We'd call them "overnight punks" or "insta-punks." In the '80s, it became really divided — you were art, new wave, hardcore, or rockabilly.

ED FOTHERINGHAM: It rains a lot in Seattle — people played loud guitars in their basements, and when they were old enough, they played shows.

PAUL BARKER: I remember it being fairly frustrating. Promoters just couldn't put on shows in all-ages places. It seemed easier to play in bars or taverns — as far as a place to play that serves alcohol. Also, the concept of "big fish, small pond" — there were only so many shows you could play. If you played once a month, would people still care about the band? At what point do you oversaturate it?

JOHN BIGLEY: There was no place to play — it was playing in gallery storefronts, warehouses. Once in a while, sucker some tavern into putting on a show, that would inevitably turn into a one-off calamity. "Short-haired weirdoes showed up the other night — you should have seen it!"

JOHN CONTE: [University Avenue] — the place to be. If you had something to say, if you were trying to promote your band, that was the place to hang out. It was the place to get seen, and the place to start rumors.

JIM TILLMAN: The audience was pretty much every kid that was a weirdo. There weren't too many people from the suburbs. You'd see the same people at every show, and half the people in the crowd were in bands. It was a lot more rambunctious — a lot of jumping around, hollering, and drinking. But the difference between what I see then and now is that then, there weren't any of these "New York, stand there with your arms folded" audiences. *Everybody* was jumping around.

WHITING TENNIS: One show would lead to another, and then you'd meet a friend. The next thing you know — "I can put a band together." You see kids that are younger than you — it's so inspiring.

ROD MOODY: I used to see shows all the time, and met a gay, goth Fartz fanatic named Wilum Pugmyr, who ran a great zine called *Punk Lust*, which largely served as his outlet to gush about the Fartz.

TIM HAYES: When I'd go to Seattle I'd pick up a copy of *Desperate Times* — a great local punk zine that would have show reviews and write-ups on new bands and records. If there was a show in Seattle we wanted to see, I'd drive the vw bus or Ghia to Oly, pick up Greg and Swervo or whoever, buy a fifth of whiskey, a half rack of cheap beer, and head to the show. We'd get as far as Fife — twenty miles from Olympia — and have to pick up another half rack. By the time we parked at the garage across from the Showbox, Greg would be passed out and Swervo puking his guts. After shows I wouldn't get back to Aberdeen until five in the morning — and have to work a few hours later.

CHUCK DUKOWSKI: The first Black Flag shows in Seattle must have been in 1979 or 1980. The first tour took us north to Vancouver by way of San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle. The first show was at a kind of fancy club beneath a restaurant in the waterfront entertainment district of Seattle. Ron Reyes [aka Chavo Pederast] was the singer at the time. We did two sets and opened for Chinas Comidas on at least one. When we went on, the crowd was small but grew. We extended it by repeating a few songs and playing a long and wild version of "Louie Louie." We met Kyle [Nixon] and his friends standing in the stairs outside that led to the backstage area. They invited us to their house afterward to spend the night. I remember using my baseball style slide to take down some tables in the middle of the dance floor while we were playing. There were these people in the middle of the dancing mass insisting on sitting at a table and getting all 'tudinal about it.

KYLE NIXON: February '80 [I saw] Black Flag, and then by May, I met Paul [Solger], and we formed Solger. I was raised in Bellevue, which is across the lake from Seattle — the east side. By the time I was in the band though, I had left home, moved to Seattle, and lived with some girls. We only played seven shows. None of us knew each other and we never got along really. It came out in our music and our stage shows, but it also helped us break up quicker too.

STEVE MACK: We were suburban kids, and Kyle decided, "Let's invite Black Flag to play." We didn't know what we were going to do and how we



Seattle punks, early '80s

were going to pay them. And Kyle said, “I’ve talked to these guys, and what they need is a copy machine to make flyers.” He’ll probably kill me for saying this, but what he did was swipe the copy machine from his mom’s office, and promised Black Flag that if they came up and played, they could have it! So we had a gig in this hall down on the Central District of Seattle. At that point, the Central District was pretty rough. He asked me to be security, which is laughable, because I’m not a big, threatening guy at all. So there we are. All of a sudden, all these punk rock people started showing up at the venue — we were way out of our depth at that point. These are like city kids with honest-to-God leather jackets, purple hair.

The promoter decided to pull the gig. “You didn’t tell me this was a punk rock gig — I’m not letting punk rockers play through my PA!” We spent hours trying to convince this guy, “*Please*, you got to understand — we’ve got people driving up from Los Angeles.” We convinced the guy to leave his PA there. The second band was Pointed Sticks [from Vancouver] — they started playing, people started slam dancing, and somebody called the police. The police came and shut the place down. I had a big slash mark across my face where some girl grabbed me. I went back across the water to Bellevue that night, feeling like it had been a rite of passage.

CHUCK DUKOWSKI: I remember wishing they hadn't stolen that Xerox machine. They were so earnest and excited about it, you couldn't say no. And it never worked — we tried to have it repaired and everything!

DUFF McKAGAN: Black Flag really started to hit its stride when Henry [Rollins] first got in the band. *It was godlike.*

DERRICK BOSTROM: You've got to keep in mind that when you're in Seattle — especially if you're the Meat Puppets — you're really focused on the next day, which is when you hit that Canadian border. You get up early and vacuum the shit out of your van. Most of my memories of Seattle is doing just that.

SLIM MOON: I went to a DOA show that turned into a riot. All I knew about punk rock were the clichés I learned from reading *Newsweek* articles. For my first punk rock show to turn into a riot . . . I saw a skateboarder walk down the street and smash out the window of every car parked on the street with his skateboard. Set all the dumpsters on fire nearby, and somebody sprayed an anarchy sign on the side of a police car. I was like, "Oh my God, punk rock really is everything they say it is!" I jumped right into it after that.

JOE KEITHLEY: I think this was '83 or '84 — at the Lincoln Arts Center. People around the country always think of Seattle as the bastion of liberalism and progressive thinking, but for some reason, the city counselors thought it would be a wise idea for kids to hang around malls, 7-Elevens, and plan petty thefts — rather than going to listen to music. So there were never any all-ages shows in Seattle. Four hundred kids showed up, and the place held 300, so it was jam-packed. I don't think we played at all — the fire marshall came and declared the place was over-full and they didn't have a proper license. Then the fire marshall made everyone clear out of the building — at which point the Seattle police showed up. I wouldn't call it a full-scale riot, but *half* a riot happened, with bottle throwing and smashing. I remember seeing three Seattle police cars that had "DOA" spray painted on the back end of the car. I thought, "If I ever get pulled over down here and the guy figures out I'm in DOA, they're going to haul us down to the station and make us work it off in the body shop."



Canada's wild and woolly DOA (Joey Keithley is second from left)

SCOTTY CRANE: The same with the GBH/Accused show and the ferryboat — a bunch of punkers destroyed a ferryboat with axes and fire extinguishers.

TOM NIEMEYER: It was the first gig by the Accused in Seattle that my mother decided to come out to. Beer bottles were flying around the cabin of the boat, and skateboarders were trying to bust their friend out from a broom closet that the ferry workers made into an impromptu jail cell. GBH wrote a song about it called “Pass the Axe.” My mom asked if this was how all our shows ended.

JOE KEITHLEY: Vancouver and Seattle are pretty close — there's only the stupid border in the way that stops people from going to see shows back and forth. People would go, "DOA was the first or second punk band I ever saw." Between us and Black Flag, we probably did more shows, played in more towns, went back and forth, and crisscrossed more times than anybody else. I couldn't say there was anything wildly different about [Seattle crowds] — other than the fact that we could not figure why you guys were drinking this shit beer all the time. Import some Canadian stuff!

LARRY REID: Seattle got to be a high profile stop on the punk rock circuit — the audience was really enthusiastic, fairly sophisticated, and large. I think on a national level too, punk rock started to come into its own — SST, Chuck Dukowski was touring his bands to death. There were a lot of bands that were influential in Seattle that I think had impact here beyond.

KIM THAYL: Touch and Go was influential — all these Seattle bands loved the Butthole Surfers, Big Black, and Scratch Acid.

KEN STRINGFELLOW: The Wipers played in Bellingham — I got to see them at an all-ages show. That left a pretty strong impression on me.

JACK ENDINO: There was a big influence from Joy Division on quite a few people. A big influence from the Birthday Party. Both of them were weird, angular, dissonant, strange, non-commercial bands.

MATT VAUGHAN: The Replacements had a lot to do with influencing the Seattle scene. Their off-or-on performances, ripped up jeans and no care adolescent, backyard keggers, sittin' on the roof behavior was an attitude we all related to. But they were also smart and wrote great songs.

LIBBY KNUDSON: I always tell my "alternative" niece who's sixteen, "There used to be *characters*. We used to see bands and you'd be scared." Bands like Tales of Terror from San Francisco were an awesome band — I know they affected everyone. We'd never seen stuff like that before. Tex and the Horseheads — hairy-scary, fall-out-of-the-van. We would listen to Aerosmith's *Rocks*, the Stooges, the MC5, Blue Cheer, the Dead Kennedys, Black Flag — it was like the revolving jukebox. My niece always asks me, "What do you think?" And

I'm like, "Well, go buy the Scratch Acid record [1991's *The Greatest Gift*]." It was just the community thing — somebody would get a new record and go, "Oh, you've got to listen to this."

DUFFMcKAGAN: Every band was just kind of ripping off ideas, or writing ideas/songs together. It was very paternal. Every band had every other band's back — it was like nothing I've ever seen since.

CHAD CHANNING: We wouldn't have a whole lot of money. We'd have enough — three or four bucks — to get across the ferry, and then we'd try to figure out how to get into the shows. There was one occasion, where a couple of my friends had managed to sneak on the ferryboat, sneak into the show — I think they went to see Fang — and then ended up sneaking back on the ferryboat again.

KEVIN WOOD: There was nothing going on in Bainbridge. It was more of a hippie community. It was just easy — jump on a ferry and you're right downtown, in the middle of the thick of it all. The music scene — right there pretty much at the end of a ferry ride.

JONATHAN EVISON: My chief contribution to the history of Seattle music is that I introduced Stoney Gossard and Andy Wood on Bainbridge Island in 1983. Stoney used to spend the night on the island now and then and go to school with me. Andy and I had home ec class together at the time. That's where they met. I was thirteen when I started March of Crimes. I was called Munkeyseeker back in the day — don't ask me why. Ben Shepherd joined the band in 1982. Ben was excellent — as long as he ate his lithium. His Twin Reverb was the sweetest sounding amp ever. Stone Gossard joined the band in 1984 — he brought some Van Halen licks with him. To Stone's credit, the first song he ever wrote had two guitar parts — one of them consisted of a single note that was bent up and down to dizzying effect, the other part had two chords. I sometimes call March of Crimes "the Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers of the Seattle punk scene,"



A young, pre-Soundgarden Ben Shepherd

because of the number of distinguished talents that worked their way through our ranks. We gave Jello Biafra the master tape of what was supposed to be our record, and he lost it. We were too stupid to make a copy.

SLIM MOON: March of Crimes was one of the greatest hardcore bands I'd ever seen. It's crazy how many people from all these bands came from Port Orchard or Gig Harbor. There was a whole scene over there, and Ben was one of those. You could make an argument that the story of the Seattle scene is really the story of just one or two graduation classes in Gig Harbor [laughs]. The people that invented grunge.

KRISHA AUGEROT: We would regularly hang out at Nordstrom's café — Stone and Regan picking out the ladies [laughs]. It was kind of the glam time — Stone had long hair and lots of hairspray, scarves. And Regan as well — a little bit of lipstick or eyeliner.

STEVE TURNER: It was so alien to me. I remember friends trying to convince me that KISS was cool. I was like, "God, that stuff is *so* stupid" [laughs]. [My first band] was the Ducky Boys, and that was just Jeff Covell and Stone. We never even played a show — we just played in Jeff's basement. They were kind of metal kids, and I was a punk rocker. They actually turned me on to some stuff I liked, like Motörhead and early Alice Cooper. And I turned them on to more of the punk rock stuff — I remember Stone liking the more melodic/L.A. kind of hardcore stuff, like Agent Orange and Social Distortion. Before that, he'd hated all punk rock [laughs]. We cross-pollinated a bit, tried to play some songs, and never really got anywhere.

CHAD CHANNING: We were mischief-makers. In Kingston, when we lived there, there was no "cop shop." If someone called the police, it would take the police twenty minutes to show up — because the closest cop shop was in Poulsbo. We used to go out at night, and never stay at anybody's place. I would say, "I'm going to stay at Andy's house," Andy would tell his dad, "I'm going to stay at Ben's," and Ben would say, "I'm going to stay at Chad's." And we ended up not staying *anywhere* — just camp out in the woods for the evening. Hang out, spray paint the town — cans at the ready. We did a fair share of getting things by "sticky fingers."