

The History of Rock Music: 1976-1989

New Wave, Punk-rock, Hardcore

[History of Rock Music](#) | [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-75](#) | [1976-89](#) | [The early 1990s](#) | [The late 1990s](#) | [The 2000s](#) | [Alpha index](#)

Musicians of [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-76](#) | [1977-89](#) | [1990s in the US](#) | [1990s outside the US](#) | [2000s](#)

[Back to the main Music page](#)

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Extreme Hardcore

(These are excerpts from my book ["A History of Rock and Dance Music"](#))

Great Lakes 1984-89

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Some of the wildest, noisiest and most unrelenting hardcore was produced in the Great-Lake states at the end of the 1980s. These were the areas where the legacy of MC5 and Stooges was still alive, and the new generations lived up to it. Wisconsin boasted two of the least orthodox bands. [Die Kreuzen](#) (2) bridged the original punk anti-heroes with the post-punk heroes of the 1990s. The hardcore miniatures of **Die Kreuzen** (1984) harked back to the Germs, but the singer sounded like a homicidal madman, as opposed to an agonizing suicidal maniac. Their melodramatic skills peaked with the better-structured and proto-grunge **Century Days** (1988). [Kildozer](#) (2) specialized in antics that were simultaneously grim, ruthless and magniloquent. **Intellectuals Are The Shoeshine Boys Of The Ruling Elite** (1984) and **Snakeboy** (1985) mixed Birthday Party and Cramps with sheer revulsion, and occasionally delved into the most harrowing blues psychodramas since the Doors.

Michigan's [Laughing Hyenas](#) (11) beat everyone else in terms of ferocity, cruelty and savagery. The mini-album **Merry Go Round** (1987) introduced their nightmarish art, anchored to John Brannon, Iggy Pop's worthy disciple, who screamed like an emphatic preacher on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His diction turned into the noise of vomiting on the seminal **You Can't Pray A Lie** (1989), a collection of lugubrious tornado-ballads that at times sounded like southern boogie played by a pack of gorillas and occasionally yielded the most visceral, skewed and excoriating blues since Janis Joplin. It was a theatre of horror, fear, grief, hatred and violence. Surprisingly, the band ended its career with an abstraction of the Rolling Stones sound, **Hard Times** (1995).

The [Cows](#) (14), from Minneapolis, were both clowns and delinquents at the same time. Their visceral style was full of sarcasm as well as of defiance. The bacchanals ignited by vocalist Shannon Selberg and guitarist Thor Eisenstrager, and by one of the rowdiest rhythm sections in the world, evoked the Stooges and MC5 via the Butthole Surfers, but were also a self-parody of the entire alt-rock generation. **'Taint Pluribus 'Taint Unum** (1987) and especially **Daddy Has A Tail** (1989) were merry-go-rounds of (deliberately) grotesque, brutal and perverted affronts. The Cows' riotous sonic nonsense got clad in a sturdier wall of noise on **Effete And Impudent Snobs** (1990). Their effervescent napalm-like beastly and bluesy rave-ups began to betray a rootsy element, that slowly but steadily changed the essence of **Peacetika** (1991) and **Cunning Stunts** (1992), leading to the mature synthesis of **Sexy Pee Story** (1993) and **Orphan's Tragedy** (1994), perhaps the ultimate testament of their mad genius. Their art was the antithesis of elegance.

Indiana's [Lazy Cowgirls](#) (2) were punks, but punks who played good, old rock'n'roll. They just happened to play it three times faster and louder than they did in the old days. The Lazy Cowgirls were not lazy at all: they had the Ramones and the New York Dolls in their blood. **Lazy Cowgirls** (1985) and **Tapping The Source** (1987) were party-records for feverish ceremonies of self-destruction, with echoes of Seeds and 13th Floor Elevators.

[Death Of Samantha](#) (11), formed by John Petkovic in Ohio, crafted **Strungout On Jargon** (1986), an unlikely combination of Pere Ubu, Television and R.E.M. Emotional vocals, that were alternatively sarcastic and melodramatic, roamed atmospheres that were frequently an even more unlikely hybrid of Ray Davies' clownish realism, Jim Morrison's psychotic shamanism, Brecht's decadent cabaret and Beckett's enigmatic theater. The anthemic and relentless rock'n'roll of **Where The Women Wear The Glory And The Men Wear The Pants** (1988) bridged the new wave and the new pop-rock. Five years after disbanding Death of Samantha, Petkovic basically reformed them under a new name, [Cobra Verde](#) (1), to record a new album, **Viva La Muerte** (1994), that continued to explore the same border of rock'n'roll, new wave, and pop.

These were among the hardest-sounding of hardcore bands. The journey that had begun with the clownish refrains of the Ramones had reached a madhouse and a maximum security prison.

At least two all-female bands debuted in the second half of the decade with a raw and visceral rock'n'roll style that predated the riot-grrrrls of the 1990s. Toronto's [Fifth Column](#) were not afraid of displaying minimal musical skills on **To Sir With Hate** (1986). And the abrasive and spasmodic aesthetics of Ohio's [Scrawl](#) (1) peaked on their third album **Smallmouth** (1990), while **Velvet Hammer** (1993) revealed vocalist Marcy Mays' desperate persona;

Australia 1985-87

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Australia, one of the countries where punk-rock had originated, raised two

of the most extreme bands. [King Snake Roost](#) (11) crafted a masterpiece of casual aberration, **Things That Play Themselves** (1988), their second album, as dark and hot as hell itself. Their hardcore was mixed with raw, primitive, clumsy blues and jazz, enhanced by Charlie Tolnay's scorching guitar, and, under the apparent artlessness, referenced a multitude of styles, from Minutemen to Sonny Sharrock. **Ground Into The Dirt** (1990) lost some of the intensity, but was even more experimental.

Stuart "Stu Spasm" Gray, the brain behind [Lubricated Goat](#) (4), epitomized punk aesthetics and ethos as much as Foetus or Darby Crash. A citizen of the world, Gray instantiated the band first in Australia, then in Britain and finally in the USA. **Plays The Devil's Music** (1987) sounded like sheer provocation. The "songs" referenced Sex Pistols, Pere Ubu, Suicide and Birthday Party, but no care was put into composing or performing them. **Paddock Of Love** (1988) was tragic where the previous one had been grotesque. The theme of these works was simply the explosive energy, the discharge of sadomaso libido, unbridled violence and massive gloom. Macabre and psychedelic effects increased the suicidal atmosphere. Gray began cleaning up with the electronic **Psychedelicatessen** (1990), which ventured into industrial music and his own idea of dance-music. The New York incarnation of Lubricated Goat, which featured Swans' drummer Vinnie Signorelli, Cop Shoot Cop's guitarist Tod Ashley, Railroad Jerk's bassist Tony Lee and Motherhead Bug's trumpet player Jim Collaruso, changed course again: **Forces You Don't Understand** (1995), his most musical work, offered calmer, wiser and even elegant blues-jazz excursions. Gray came full circle with **Crunt** (1993), a new project launched with wife and Babes In Toyland's guitarist Kat Bjelland, and Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's drummer Russell Simins. Its tight garage-punk was just a bit old-fashioned.

[continues...](#) | [back...](#) | [Index](#)