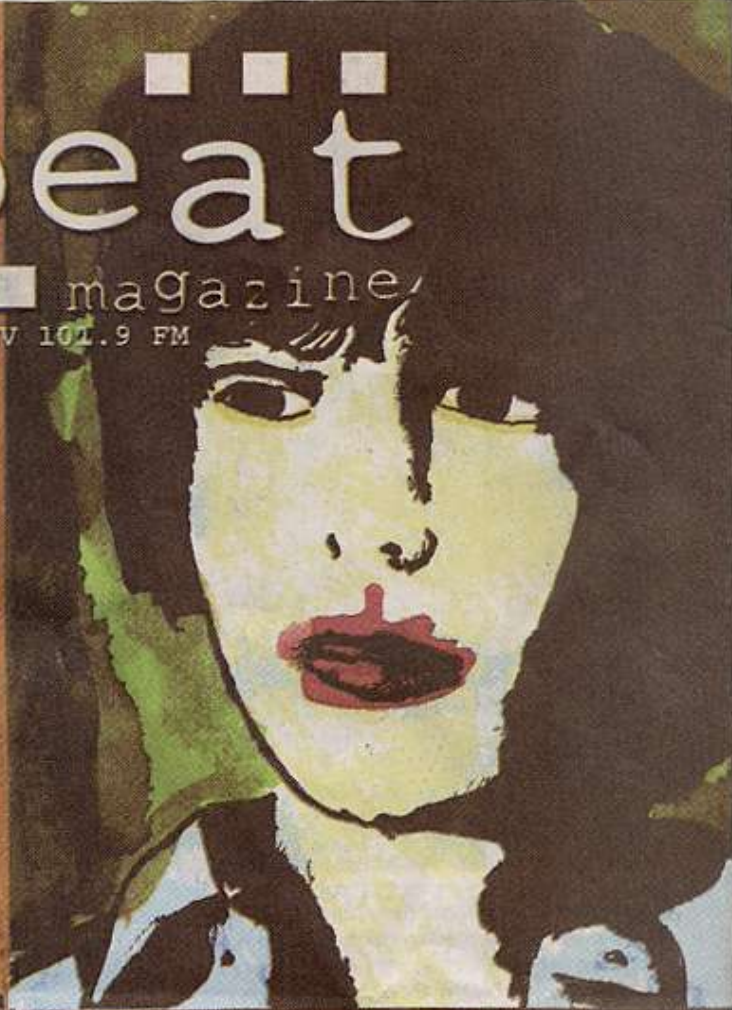
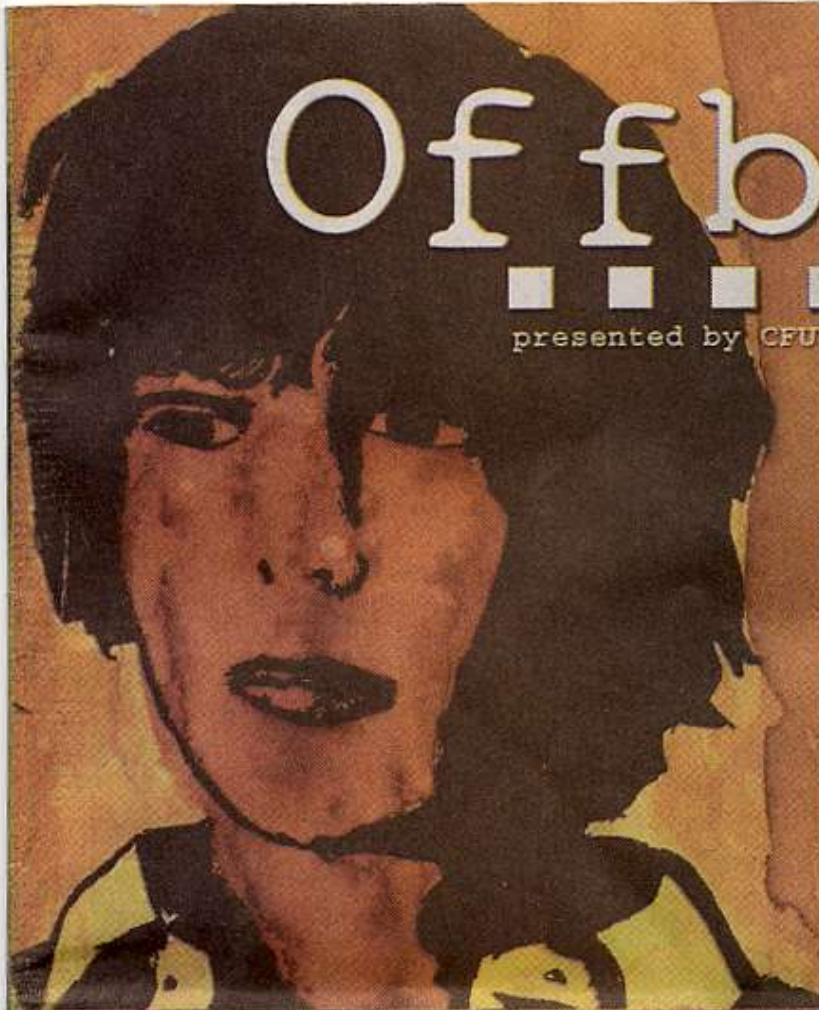


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Gearfest

EXPERIENCED BY TIM HORNER



Days before returning to UVic to wrap up my undergrad, I still had an unused pass burning a hole in my pants for a free flight anywhere in North America. My destination for the Labour Day weekend? Where else but Austin, Texas for Gearfest USA (www.gearfest.com), a three-day, thirty band extravaganza hosted by Gearhead Records, taking place at the legendary Emo's nightclub.

FRIDAY

After flying standby and being re-routed across most of America, I made it to Austin in time to catch the denim-clad glory stomp of The Lords of Altmont. Their flaming keyboard climax didn't help the already sweltering heat.

The club is divided into two stages: indoor and outdoor with a patio in-between. For the festival, one band played while the other set up on the empty alternate stage. An amazing collection of young groups from Texas hosted the inside stage tonight. Highlights included the teen trash of The Jewws and the explosive Riverboat Gamblers, who lived up to their preceding rep as one of Austin's most beloved. On the outside stage, American institutions such as the Lazy Cowgirls and DMZ played seminal hits for the over-thirty set.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

With an invite from Matt of The Jewws (a great guy with an inexhaustible knowledge of British Columbia's best bands), I made my way to Sound Exchange, the top indie record store of the city. Sound Exchange hosted a free, five-band in-store, starring The Stains, The Ki-Nives, White Heat, The Jewws and Chicago's The Baseball Furies. If a Saturday afternoon spent shopping for records and watching the groups you are shopping for wasn't heaven enough, the staff tapped a keg and handed out free beer ta boot! Shopping in the surliest of hipster record stores is surprisingly calming when handed a foamy cup of Lone Star.

SATURDAY NIGHT

After surviving a run-in with drunken white trash on the public transit, I was geared for night two.

On the outdoor stage, Austin faves Sugar Shack started my night off in fine style. Then I trekked inside for current punk rawk darlings The Baseball Furies. While I applaud any group that references The Warriors, and admittedly, the bass player was transfixing (he didn't play his bass so much as punch it with bloodied knuckles), there was something lacking: Fun. A perfect segue to San Francisco popsters Red Planet, who turned off some with their smiles and

hail a cab, I witnessed the frightening results of public drunkenness in the wake of a big college football win.

SUNDAY

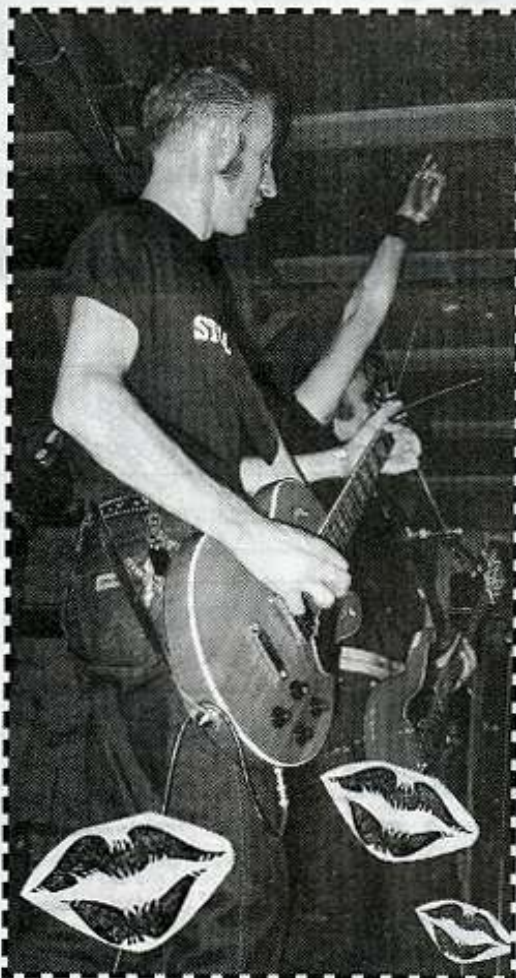
My ghoulish night out started with San Francisco's garagers Killer's Kiss. Next were Madison, Wisconsin's Knuckle Dragger, a surf/schtick/instro band that wore monkey masks and dinner jackets. The coolest thing about Knuckle Dragger was the keyboard itself; it was rigged with a pair of propane tanks, controlled by a foot pedal, which propelled really big fireballs. Fuck yeah!

Next, I headed back to Emo's for what would be a re-defining moment in the eighteen years that I've enjoyed live music: The Total Sound Group Direct Action Committee. A phoenix rising from the ashes of the Lord High Fixers, Tim Kerr and company started off with their trademark maximum R'n'B sound. Friends and band members came and went, with no less than ten musicians on stage at any given moment. This was not so much a band as it was a collective. As the set reached a crescendo, several audience members set up drum kits around the perimeter of the dance floor. A horn section appeared on top of the pool table. A child no older than six hopped on stage and began playing pots and pans with a wooden spoon.

It was absolute sound: inclusive, communicative and celebratory. The Total Sound Group Direct Action Committee broke down the artificial dichotomy between audience and performer.

I suppose the rest of the evening's offerings were fine. Both The Hard Feelings and The Sons of Hercules were solid. The Turbo A.C.'s and the much-ballyhooed Demons from Stockholm played some Misfits covers. The New Bomb Turks were as hard and fast as imagined. But it was back to the ol' stand-and-watch song and dance.

The next morning, as I headed home for my final semester of university, I couldn't shake the feeling that it would be hard to re-tread through the past. Especially when future possibilities permeated like the Texan sun.



humor, but kept me thoroughly entertained. Red Planet's lead guitarist played with a lack of self-restraint that could only be rivaled by former Hudson Mack frontman Dave Morin! After solid sets from headliners The Gaza Strippers and The Dragons, I spilled out onto Sixth Street, the Austin equivalent of Calgary's Electric Ave, only exponentially worse. During the 45 minutes spent trying to