

ARTCORE

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STATE FUNERAL *PROTEST MUSIC* 7" EP

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REALLY RED

WE REFUSE TO QUIT: AN INTERVIEW WITH REALLY RED'S DRUMMER BOB WEBER AND THE MYDOLLS!

Although well admired during the 1980s, Really Red seemed to slip into the dustbin of punk history while Texas acts like the Dicks, MDC, Big Boys, and others maintained steady appeal. The Houston band's mix of jittery art rock, furious and off-kilter punk, and homegrown free jazz bursts were uncanny and unique. The signature, chilling tune "Teaching You The Fear" detailed the horrendous abuse of local police against gays and minorities in the late 1970s, while tunes like "Nico" proved their affection for earlier proto-punks Velvet Underground. The band toured the Midwest and West Coast, played locally with tons of touring luminaries like Bad Brains, Circle Jerks, and others, set up the DIY label CIA records, and soon became friends with Articles of Faith and the Dead Kennedys, whose singer Jello Biafra placed the short sharp "Prostitution" from Really Red's first LP, on the seminal hardcore punk and art-rock compilation Let Them Eat Jellybeans.

Art-punk pioneers Mydolls were also part of Houston's fecund scene as well. They eschewed the typical rock'n'roll clichés and bombast and aimed for a more cerebral meld of synth-punk and slanted guitar, proto-feminist tirades, frenetic poetry, and tribal stomp meets Latin style drumming. They soon released material on CIA records as well, toured the Midwest and East Coast, played locally with notable bands like Minor Threat, the Cramps, and Siouxsie and the Banshees, starred in Paris, TX by Wim Wenders, and have played on and off again from 1978 until today. Their singer Linda has also been married to two members of Really Red. This interview was conducted with Really Red drummer Bob Weber, who has played with Anarchitex since the mid-1980s and Mydolls, who chose to respond en masse to the questions. Both Bob and Dianna and Trish of Mydolls currently play with me in No Love Less as well.

Please visit my two digital archives of the band's visual histories. David Ensminger.

ARTCORE - Tell me about the earliest influences that shaped the sound of the bands. For instance, the Mydolls features George's untraditional rock style percussion, skittering guitar, and poem-lyrics, and the first Really Red album seems equally art-punk, even though "Prostitution" was on the pioneering hardcore compilation Let Them Eat Jellybeans?

WEBER - I was surprised when I learned that Jello picked "Prostitution" for that LP. Really Red was exploring different styles, though. U-Ron was continually feeding me things I had never heard before. His life was about records for 18 hours a day. We were all inspired by the DIY revolution, of course. There was the more edgy stuff, but I can't remember exactly. Let me go look at my record collection... OK, definitely John Cale, Can, Brian Eno, Peter Gabriel, Peter Hammill, Phil Manzanera, David Thomas, Wire, The Slits, The Soft Machine, Siouxsie, The Velvets (of course!), Tom Waits, and Kraftwerk. But, I suppose the influences that you are referring to were even earlier, Kelly, John Paul, and Ronnie's exposure to Texas 1960's music (Bubble Puppy, The Bad Seeds, Red Krayola, the Elevators). I learned the drum set playing jazz standards in school stage bands, playing with a Michigan cousin who knew some Rolling Stones, listening to my sister's Vanilla Fudge record, and playing with some school band buddies who were into Zappa. I had no plan.

MYDOLLS - The Mydolls were influenced by The Raincoats, Slits, local bands, Velvet underground, X-Ray Spex, Joy Division, Siouxsie, LilipUT, Au Pairs, Patti Smith, Glam rock, and hardcore bands. George's untraditional percussion was influenced by Buddy Miles meets Keith Moon, while the skittering guitars were the creation of Trish and Linda sharing the fret board, playing the same chord but trading off lower and higher strings. Dianna and Trish would trade off lines for lyrics, co-writing most of Mydolls lyrics, with exception of Linda on "Therapist." Let's just say Mydolls is a collaboration of whatever it is meant to be.

ARTCORE - People have told me clubs like The Island seemed to stir the punk scene more than venues like Parade, the gay club. To people outside of Houston, how would you describe the dynamic of the clubs?

WEBER - That question is too complex for me.

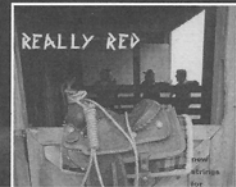
MYDOLLS - The Island was the only club, it was the hub. We'd go to shows occasionally at other places, like the Parade would have punk rock night, and there was some rock'n'roll club way out the southwest side, and then there was the reggae club in the Village, the Caribana, that had great shows for a little while. Joe Star's Omni too. We played with Butthole Surfers at the Ale House, which was haunted. We remember Kurt Kren crooning with us, singing his version of "Rumpelstiltskin" in German. Great memories. We performed in performance venues like Studio One, which was William Steen and Mel Chin's art studio downtown on Congress Street, and Alameda Arts Project, which turned into Diverse Works. Lawndale gallery, actually on Lawndale St., was open for show. We played bigger clubs like Numbers, where we opened for Siouxsie.

ARTCORE - The Mydolls always reminds us that punk was "not just boys fun." Yet, you did develop in the South, so did attitudes and prejudices run deep? Bob, as a comrade, did you see the gender issue being a big deal?

WEBER - I don't think so. Well - there were clashes between sub-scenes, and general immaturity and posturing. That was normal for an undisciplined gathering of youth who were, should I say, the more theatrical personalities in the class.

MYDOLLS - We're Texans, not southerners, so "Fuck you! We're from Texas."

ARTCORE - Tell me how CIA began to develop, essentially as a collective? Did people communicate with other labels, like Alternative Tentacles, to understand how to operate and market?



mydolls



ARTCORE - Going through the archives, I realized how important college radio was to both Really Red and Mydolls, and the local fanzine scenes as well. How would you explain the difference between the old and new media?

WEBER - Funny, until we fessed up to it, we didn't realize how great it was having Pacifica and college radio in the '70's and '80's. There was a revolution going on supporting independent artists - diverse independent artists - and all we had to do was tap into it. Thanks to Maximum R'n'R, Another Room, OP Magazine, Creep, No Aarhus, and other music rags, we found names and addresses and phone numbers. Of course then it took a real commitment to follow through, but that was the point - get off your ass and make something happen.

Today it feels like a different world. With so much more music being created by thousands of bands, I am actually finding it a huge challenge to get the Anarchitex noticed. This, even though I believe that the content of Anarchitex lyrics and style stand above the rest. Of course it's still just a part time effort. But I stray in my private world... What stands out to me is that before we were small, but indomitable and unstoppable. The new media is so massive and discrete, it seems that the small impact an indie band makes with a limited effort gets rapidly diffused.

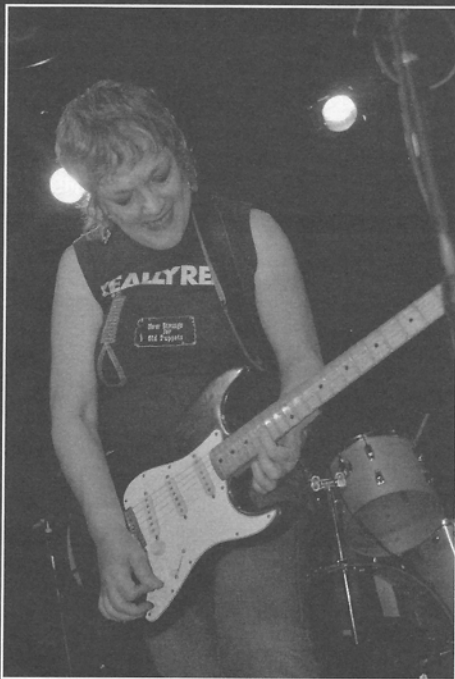
MYDOLLS - Radio programs like the S&M show at KTRU at Rice University was influential. KPFT (Pacifica) was so helpful, and supportive local support was amazing. Public radio rocks!

ARTCORE - Really Red and Mydolls toured opposite coasts, RR headed West mostly, while Mydolls went East. Were the scenes genuinely welcoming and excited, or did you meet your fair share of indifference and egos?

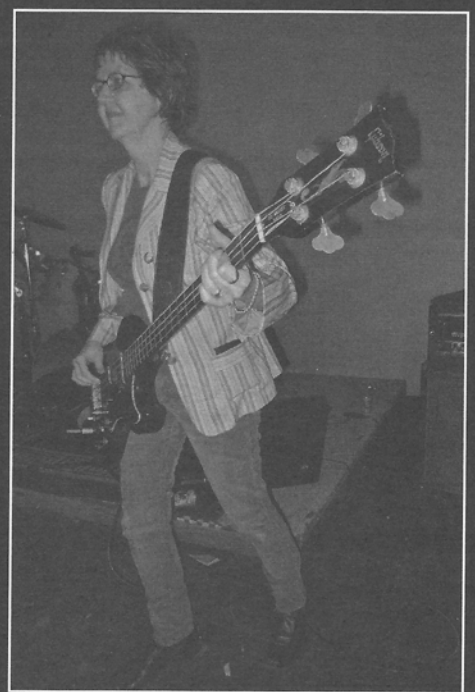
WEBER - You always have to work at it to get someone else motivated, even if you are Tony Fucking Robbins!

ARTCORE - Both bands overlapped into the art community; for instance, Mydolls performed at The Orange Show and appeared in the film Paris, TX, and RR worked with Kurt Kren. As the hardcore era began to bloom, do you think the art community was more accepting of both bands than the hardcore punk scene?

WEBER - Really Red intentionally veered towards hardcore as it evolved in the 1980s, for better or worse, so that worked for us. But you're right, we did have some pals. Our personal and recreational relationships with Ralph McKay, John Peters ("No Art in Houston") and Bill Steen were the flypaper. Heck, we were just looking for trouble wherever we could find it.



WEBER - Yes, that's about it. Indie bands writing new music have to develop an audience, and Really Red made a pact to stay independent and undermine the corporate machine. So, it was referred to as DIY, do-it-yourself. The big part of my spare time after work and band practice three nights a week was going through fanzines for contacts, making calls, sending out promo copies of a 45 single, writing letters etc. Setting up band tours was a big effort. It was only natural to work with the other local bands and share contact info. Dealing with the indie distributors (Rough Trade, Systematic, etc.) took time, so I helped out a few other local bands by sharing the C.I.A. Records label and helping with shipping and collections. Imagine me, the tough guy, threatening the distributors to get them to pay up! Each band did most of their own promo. We shared time and costs putting together some adverts for C.I.A. releases in a few fanzines. Those got us some inquiries from all corners, Europe included.



MYDOLLS - The art, dance, and music scene were much, much more melded than today. It was not the encapsulated big business it is today. It was a creative, inclusive explosion.

ARTCORE - When Mydolls choose songs to become part of their newest sets, how do you pick them? And Bob, what Really Red songs still speak to you strongly?

WEBER - Well, Biscuit Bombs have drilled "I Refuse To Sing" back into my lobotomized head. And there's "War Sucks," even though that was a Red Krayola song, and "Nico" and "A Reminder." I have a soft side, you know.

<http://mydolls1978.wordpress.com/>
<http://reallyredtx.wordpress.com/>