

Industrial Arts

Mindless Faith brings industrial sound to the local music scene

By DAVID ANDREWS
Collegian Arts Writer

"There are fans of industrial music out there."

— Jordan Harris
freshman-liberal arts



Courtesy of Interscope Records

rent Reznor, the driving force behind the group Nine Inch Nails, has gained popularity through his unique brand of industrial music.

Industrial music makes big noise

Long in the shadows of happier fare, industrial music is starting to emerge into the mainstream music scene.

By GEORGE MASEK
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A friend has the audacity to leave the new Skinny Puppy CD at your house. After a moment of contemplation, you decide to subject your stereo to this form of audible violence. The first track presents a calm introduction resembling a classical piece, when suddenly you're treated to the punishing beat of a resonating drum machine, screeching feedback and guitar distortion pushed almost to the point of becoming static leaving your eardrums in a state of caustic obliteration.

What you just listened to was the sound of industrial music.

Spawned from groups like Clock DVA and Throbbing Gristle, industrial music has grown as an insurgent kindred to heavy metal and early '80s synth pop. As the technological machine drives on through the '90s, more and more bands are beginning to incorporate keyboards and computers into their music.

Though the term industrial can cover a broad range of sub-genres such as gothic, ambient and in some occasions even techno, the picture immediately drawn to mind is the abrasive guitars, discordant samples and reverberated keyboard lines of renowned acts Ministry and Nine Inch Nails.

In recent years, the dance-oriented fuel that ignited the industrial revolution seems to have given way to a more marketable ensemble of crunching guitar riffs and angst-ridden vocals exemplified by Ministry's new opus, *Filth Pig*.

"I think all the old-school industrial bands like Ministry and Front Line Assembly have made it a point to incorporate heavy metal guitars," said Dan Baker (junior-aerospace engineering), an industrial music fan and musician.

Baker is somewhat skeptical toward the motivation behind mainstream industrial progression.

"I'd like to think that the point of it is not to try and make money or reach more of an audience, but that's the way it does seem," Baker said.

Some fans differ from this view entirely. Ron Davies (graduate-economics) feels that industrial has stayed with its original format while convoluting with new influences.

"It's taken into account the influences that younger people have grown up on the Cure, and even incorporated some techno," Davies said.

Davies, who plays guitar in a local industrial band called Spine, has been listening to industrial music for seven years. Though he still claims perennial standbys KMFDM and Skinny Puppy as

favorites, he said he has noticed a change in a music scene once savored by a quiet, underground minority.

"It's still kind of a do-what-you-want attitude, although it's kind of losing that as the more mainstream people catch on to it and expect certain things," Davies said.

In a local underground scene here that is dedicated to serving ska and hard-core, little attention has been paid to industrial until recently. With the success of the Marilyn Manson show at Crowbar, 420 E. College Ave., in January, Dante's Inc. promoter Dave Wells said there appears to be a growing market for industrial.

"It's a good music and I think the interest is growing," Wells said. "As that need becomes greater, so will our supply of industrial music," he added.

Though Crowbar may be too small to host a large act like Ministry, Wells said lesser-known acts, such as Sister Machine Gun, would draw fans.

"If you put a couple of (industrial bands) together, people trust that it's going to be a good show," he added.

While Wells said a relatively small number of local industrial acts represent the scene well, Davies, as a member of a fledgling band, believes otherwise.

"The scene here is compact, it's hard to get into because not many bars will give new bands a chance," Davies said.

Stabilizing in popularity after much deserved success, Ministry and Nine Inch Nails have continued to thrive in record sales.

However, a plethora of acts have followed the road before them and are beginning to over-saturate the genre.

"I don't think it's gotten more popular in the last few years, but I don't think it's really declined either," said Jay Williams, assistant manager at Blue Train Compact Disc, 418 E. College Ave.

As a former fan of industrial, Williams has a jaded view on the music's recent progression, believing it to be a dead-end road. He said while a few bands have met with commercial success, most industrial albums remain cherished by a select audience.

"The people that buy it seem to be really gung-ho about it," Williams said.

Opinions about industrial music seem to vary as much as the bands themselves.

Because many consist of only one or two musicians, the message they convey is often personalized and sometimes isolatory. The listener is either singled out or alienated. For some, this hit-or-miss approach is alluring and ideal. As a musician, Davies relates well to the industrial philosophy.

"It's more about doing what you can do all by yourself," he said. "It's not necessarily relying on the band format or the ability to play traditional instruments. It's more just thinking for yourself and doing what you feel is best."

This may be the home of Jason and Chris Sevanick, but at first glance it looks like a fortune teller's chamber. Jason and Chris, members of local industrial band Mindless Faith, sit under a dimmed light covered by a draped white cloth. Nearby is a blue-glass figure of a head, and candles drip from nearby shelves.

One item gives away the musical nature of the room, though. In a corner of the room sits a long keyboard, complete with the dozens of buttons and flashing lights that characterize a sampler.

To Jason and Chris Sevanick, darkened rooms and subversive industrial music go hand-in-hand.

"It's a great creative atmosphere," said Jason, who plays guitar and sings in the band's live performances. It was in this room where much of the material from their debut album, *The Silence*, was written.

When Jason, still in high school, would visit his older brother Chris at college, he seldom went out to socialize with his brother's friends. Instead, he would sit in the room and write songs.

"I don't know if I was sulking, but I was lying down, and it was raining," Jason said of the night he wrote the album's final song, "Desert Wind."

"Desert Wind," along with the rest of *The Silence*, recreates the dark atmosphere that the band inhabits perfectly. Filled with slow, relentless rhythms and eerie electronic sounds and samples, the album has earned Mindless Faith a name beyond State College, a town not known for industrial music.

The release of the album a month ago has given the Sevanicks, along with fellow members John Boese (junior-electrical engineering) and newcomer Mike Ewall (senior-sociology), a

chance for exposure beyond the occasional performance. While they have had difficulties finding suitable venues to play, the album sales have been picking up. Songs from the album have been played on WKPS-FM (90.7) and WQWK-FM (97QWK), and Jason has been interviewed on WQWK.

The band is confident their recent upward trend will continue.

"Our popularity and sales are rising exponentially," Chris said. "Things are snowballing."

Perhaps their do-it-yourself work ethic is finally paying off. The band produced the CD on their own record label, using their own technology. And the mixing was done in their own home.

Chris sat down at the sampling keyboard and demonstrated how the album was created.

"Basically, anything audible we can put in here," he said. Sounds from other instruments, clips from movies, voices or household noises are recorded through a microphone and onto the sampler's hard drive.

Press a button here and flip a switch there, and each key elicits the sound of a bass drum in a different tone. Mix things up again, and you get the sound of a door slamming. Slipping another disk into the sampler's hard drive, Chris loaded up the percussion line from their latest song.

"You make different parts and string them all together," Jason said. When each part has been put together, the press of a button lets loose a coherent, multilayered song that lacks only the vocals and guitar parts that will be added later.

Homemade electronics also provide a multi-

media flare to their live performances. Chris created a video of distorted images, including kaleidoscopic patterns of "video feedback." The color of an ocean wave or a movie star has been altered to create a visual experience that is played at live performances to add to their effect.

Despite their efforts to create a more dynamic live show, a lack of interest in industrial music has limited their options on the live scene, although they have headlined at Crowbar, 420 E. College Ave., several times.

"There are fans of industrial music out there," said Jordan Harris (freshman-liberal arts), a fan of Mindless Faith. "But a lot of promoters don't believe it will generate good enough crowds."

He said venues such as the Asylum hesitate to book bands that don't play punk or ska.

"It takes a lot more promotion to sell an industrial band," said Derek Canova, assistant manager at Mike's Movies and Music, 210 E. Calder Way. Since no club holds an industrial or gothic night, and no other industrial bands are available to play with, exposure has been difficult to obtain.

But interest may be growing. WKPS now plays a gothic and industrial show, in which Mindless Faith was once featured as the "artist of the week." And through the Internet, people from across the country can hear clips from *The Silence* or order the album.

"I'm always getting E-mail from people all over, saying, 'I got your CD, and I really like it,'" Chris said. "It's really encouraging."



Courtesy of Capital Records

Members of the now-defunct Skinny Puppy strike a typically frightening pose. The band, one of the pioneers of industrial music, recently released their final album, *The Process*.

Skinny Puppy is gone but not forgotten

Despite their recent breakup, Skinny Puppy's last recording offers something new and innovative.

By DAVID ANDREWS
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To virgin ears, the first listen to Skinny Puppy isn't exactly a fun experience. Close your eyes and strap on the headphones, and you may start to feel like you're falling into a bottomless abyss, passing grotesque demons and images of death along the way.

Unfortunately, with their final release, *The Process*, we find that this abyss does in fact have a bottom.

Probably one of the most influential and innovative bands ever to strap on a sampling keyboard, Puppy recently broke up amid conflict between band members and the tragic death of D. R. Goettel, the band's keyboard player, in August.

The Process, recorded before the band's breakup, marks the final chapter in their turbulent existence. Though it takes the band into new directions, it is still definitely Puppy.

In typical fashion, unusually named ringleaders Nivek Ogre and cEvin Key have created a thick, swirling brew of industrial soup. Electronic blips and beeps float to the top, interspersed with Ogre's treated vocals and samples from movies.

But in a departure from 1992's *Last Rights*, the band has included some thicker chunks into the morass, with driving guitar riffs that bubble over in their most structured and melodic materials to date.

"Jahya" starts the album with winding piano melody that drifts into the listener's consciousness, then jolts him awake with driving guitars.

This tempo carries over onto "Death," which starts as a bleak mood piece, then develops into the fastest, heaviest song on the album. The guitars at the forefront occa-

sionally stop, letting in the electronic hum to remind the listener that the band hasn't completely turned to metal.

But the most surprising departure from the band is "Candle," which introduces acoustic guitars into the mix with uncharacteristic vocals that lack the metallic distortion Ogre has become accustomed to. Though the song seems a bit out of place, lyrics about "seasons of dissolute pain" and "the pit of calamity" continue the morbid mood, accented by the inevitable change to electric.

As the album progresses, new sounds added to the mix blend nicely, including a cello and viola part in "Cult." These new instruments only add to the swirling atmospherics of "Mortar" and "Process."

The latter starts with Halloween horror sounds, then moves into a chaotic collage of sampled phrases like "mass control" and "individual freedom."

"Process," though compelling in itself, starts the rest of the album off on a less adventurous trend, but

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"The Process"
Skinny Puppy

the wide vocabulary of sounds keeps things interesting. Stuttering machine gun rhythms combined with angelic hums give songs like "Curcible" and "Blue Serge" weight, though they eventually blend together.

Despite the morbid images throughout, the final track of the album offers a ray of hope. The minute-long instrumental "Cellar Heat" ends abruptly, but those who have their CD player on "repeat" will notice that this instrumental brings the album full circle with a rhythm echoed in the first song.

The circularity of *The Process* leaves a ray of hope for devastated Puppyheads: Inevitably, the legacy left by Skinny Puppy will be picked up by young industrial innovators, and the process will continue.