

The violence.

The drugs.

The death.

From Black Flag and Social Distortion to Bad Religion and The Offspring, this is the story of 20 years of LA punk... ▶

ON THE long, straight drive from Los Angeles airport, down a curving freeway, past oil wells and gas stations, diners and office supply stores, onto the long, straight road that is La Cienega Boulevard, you'll eventually see Hollywood. It rises before you on hills that appear as if – like large towns renamed as cities – they might one day like to be known as mountains. Hills that are razored – north to south, east to west – with addresses that are almost as famous as the borough they're found in; Sunset Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard, Melrose Avenue. With Beverly Hills and Venice Beach to the west, Hollywood, for the people who live there, is a sun-drenched conurbation of hotels, diners, bars, restaurants, nightclubs, venues, cinemas and convenience stores. It has fame and it has obscurity, wealth and poverty, smug contentment and arcing desperation.

And yes, of course, it has history.

The story you're about to read would simply be just that – history, nostalgia – were it not for the fact that the music, people and bands scattered over the next few pages somehow held a sway that has managed to resonate not only into the present but, surely, into the future as well. It's the story of Los Angelean punk rock; a community that provided the numbers, the passion and the longevity to take a noise that was first heard in New York City from the Ramones, then articulated in London with incandescent fury by Johnny Rotten, and shape it into an identity that was not only its own, but to keep that identity alive and growing to the point where Los Angeles, more than any other city, is the most vital location for punk rock music. For both good and ill. It has the best bands, the best history, the best stories, the strongest cast of characters, the worst violence, the shocking lows, the hardest drugs and, in the great tradition of Hollywood itself, the best and happiest ending.

Success.

This is the story of LA punk. And this is how it went down.

"YOU CAN'T over-romanticize the community really, because it was the most truly amazing, inspiring coming together of people."

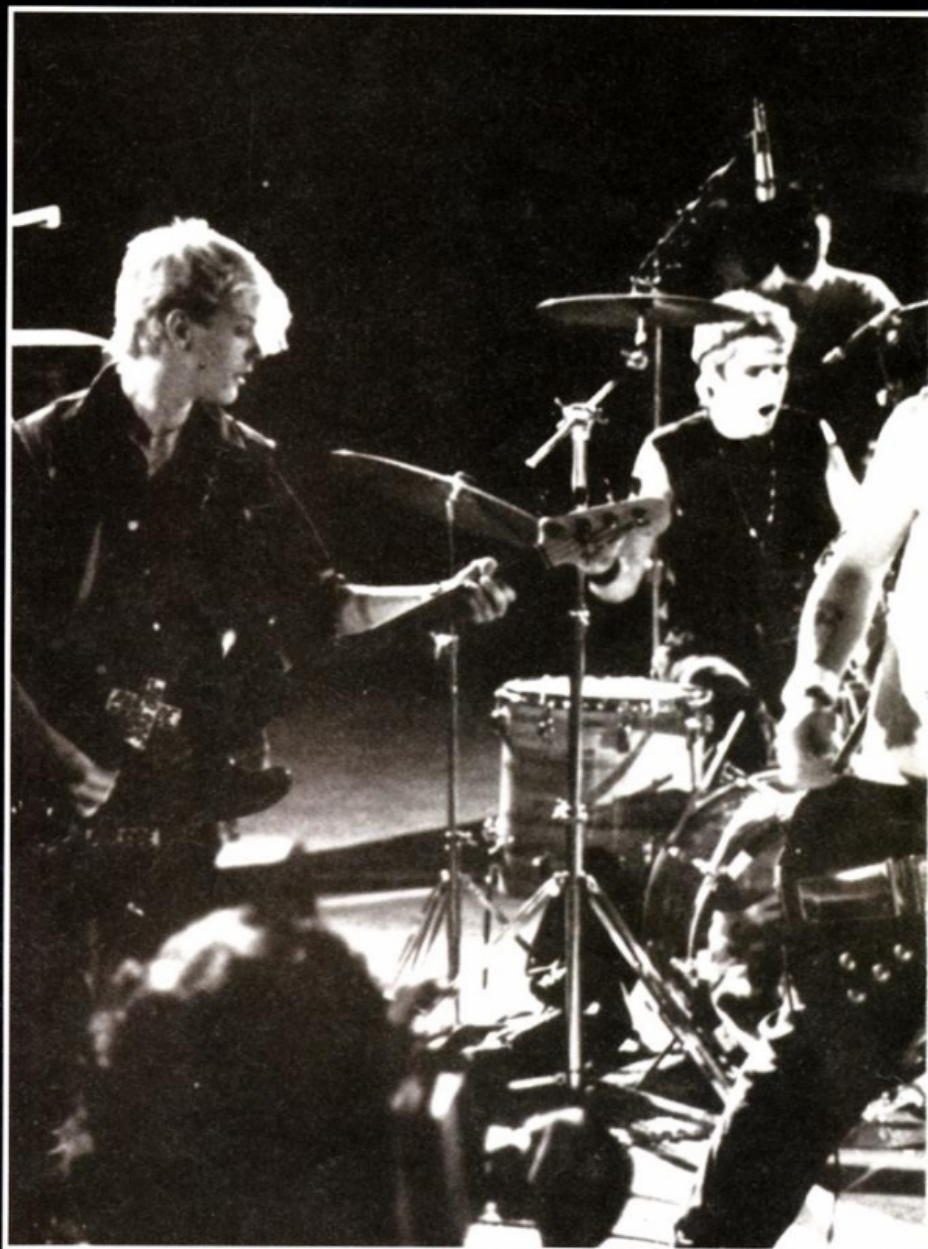
This is the opinion of Exene Cervenka, vocalist and co-songwriter of the band X, perhaps the most critically applauded – adored by everyone from Henry Rollins to Moby to the actress Jennifer Jason Leigh – and oft-mentioned of all the early Los Angeles bands.

X were formed at the end of the 1970s after Exene, born in the Illinois farm town of Mokena, had attempted to lay roots in Florida and Alabama, finally settling for Los Angeles when a girlfriend offered her a ride to the city simply as a way of offsetting the cost of petrol. If the ride had been to Chicago or Philadelphia, then Exene Cervenka would have headed there. Instead she landed in Hollywood, joining a band with bassist and vocalist John Doe – the police term for an unidentified body, a man she would also marry and later divorce – guitarist Billy Zoom and drummer DJ Bonebrake. With albums such as 'Los Angeles', 'Wild Gift' and 'Live At The Whiskey A Go-Go On The Fabulous Sunset Strip', X would go on to make punk rock music of the finest American tradition; music that has really only been touched in terms of its quality by Bad Religion.

"The scene here really started out as misfits," she says. "You would go down to (punk club) the Masque and everybody would be there. You'd have no idea how people found out about this stuff because it wasn't advertised. It wasn't really written about, it was completely underground and it was totally illegal. And how the bands knew to play there and people knew to go there was just incredible. And that was the case for several places in the city. And you'd have all sorts of people there; long hairs from the (San Fernando) Valley – like, how did they find out about it? – the Hollywood gangbangers who were like the angel dust crowd, people in make-up, 40-year-old graphic designers... You really had all manner of people.

"And for a while there'd be club gigs as well, but then they tended to stop. Club owners didn't want the Bangs (who would in time transform into the Bangles) or Fear or X playing at their places, so that of course made it even more exciting. You know, at the start LA was a really fun scene. It wasn't an intellectual scene. Although a lot of the bands were really smart, it wasn't like New York."

"I couldn't believe it when I first saw it, when I first encountered it," recalls Bad Religion guitarist Greg Hetson who, in his 40 years, has also completed tours of duty with Red Cross (as they then were, later becoming Red Kross) and the frenzied Circle Jerks – a band whose debut album, 'Group Sex', was so short (16 minutes) that Hetson



invented longer song times to go on the album sleeve for fear that no-one would buy it. "I grew up in the suburbs (near to LAX airport) and all the music I'd encountered up until that point seemed to have a massive divide between the artist and the audience. And I just took that to be the way it was, that it took years of practice to make that jump, that it was something formidable that a kid like me would never be able to achieve. But then I saw the Dickies play on the (Sunset) Strip and my life changed. I know people say that, but my life *did* change. Not only were they an amazing band – and a very underrated band – but after the show they were there talking to the audience. They were real people, they were stood talking, right there... I could go and talk to them! And if I could talk to them, then why couldn't I do what they were doing, too? And in no time at all I was in a band."

THIS IS the sort of comment that crops up in any history of the British punk community, that it was a democratic scene, its beauty being not only its energy and its anger, but the fact that anyone could join in. But this only happened for a time – two years, tops – and in the cold and grey climes of 1970s England, the rot of conformity and cartoonery quickly set in. Whereas once you had the Sex Pistols, now you had the UK Subs. Hardly a fair swap.

Starting later (the truly great albums of the period such as Black Flag's 'Everything Went Black', the Circle Jerks' 'Group Sex', X's 'Los Angeles', Fear's 'The Record' and the Germs'

'Gi' would all come in the early 1980s), the initial LA community not only seemed to last a little longer, but had a genuine – rather than an aspired to – credibility. For a start none of the bands were united by anything as contrived as a common 'LA sound'. Although this would to an extent come later, 20 years on what is most surprising about LA is just how different the bands sounded from one another.

So the studied, deliberate aggression of Black Flag sounded nothing like the rockabilly buzz of X; the careful melodies of the Adolescents sounded nothing like the ska-coloured hatred of Fear; the ceaseless abandon of the Circle Jerks sounded nothing like the awesome thud of the Germs. Add to this bands such as the Go-Go's (starring a young Belinda Carlisle and Jane Weidlin), the Runaways (Lita Ford and Joan Jett) and Social Distortion, and you'll see a group of artists who, hearteningly, were united by area dialing codes much more than they were by (three) chord progressions. If there was a distinction to be had then it came simply from the fact that the more hardcore sounding the band, the more likely they were to come from the suburbs.

Bad Religion vocalist Greg Graffin subsequently bemoaned the lack of philosophy that eventually went on to undermine and almost destroy the Los Angeles academy of punk rock. Although he's right, looking back there was certainly a fibre that held the scene together in ways that extended beyond the music.

In England, with the honourable exception of Jake Riviera's Stiff Records (home to The



Damned, Elvis Costello and Ian Dury And The Blockheads), all the bands were signed to major labels, so the minute the sound began to die and the sales began to dip, so too did the community. In Los Angeles an infrastructure existed in spite of – or perhaps to spite – the major label network. There were labels such as Slash (home to X and the Germs), SST (home to Black Flag and coordinated by the band's guitarist Greg Ginn) and Posh Boy (who released the first single from Social Distortion). There were also magazines such as 'Slash' (preceding the label) and the influential 'Flipside', which were created to colour a scene that the mainstream 'LA Times' or 'LA Weekly' would not yet dream of covering. And these magazines would tell their readers of shows in clubs such as the Whiskey A Go-Go and The Roxy on Sunset Boulevard, the Fleetwood down in Huntington Beach, the Starwood in Hollywood and the Café De Grande, just off Hollywood Boulevard. The artist Spot would ink black and white flyers portraying Charles Manson, Ronald Reagan or Mickey Mouse blowing the bugle for Black Flag shows all over town, with radio ads ridiculing the voice of Adam Ant, imploring people to attend.

"We were teenagers and we were reacting against society, and society was reacting against us," says Mike Ness, frontman with Orange County's excellent Social Distortion. "It was very volatile. And we weren't about to allow society to tell us that we couldn't do

"We were teenagers and we were reacting against society, and society was reacting against us..."

Mike Ness, Social Distortion

this. At the same time we'd turn on the television and you'd see the face of Phil Collins filling the screen, and that would make us want to kick in our TV sets. Back then punk rock was very real to us. It was our voice. And it was really all we had."

IF PUNK rock in Los Angeles had its voice, then it also had its amplifier. It went by the name of Rodney Bingenheimer, the voice behind perhaps the most famous radio show in the world: 'Rodney On The Roq'.

Bingenheimer was born in the Bay Area of San Francisco – he won't tell you his age,

preferring instead to describe himself as "ageless" – but moved south to Los Angeles, originally running a club near the Denny's diner on the west end of Sunset Boulevard. It was there that people such as Iggy Pop would play while Bingenheimer filled the PA with sounds between sets. Eventually the DJ was approached by the radio station KROQ to host a show that initially ran for a couple of hours on Saturday nights, but which would grow into 'Rodney On The Roq', four hours a night – eight till midnight – on Saturdays and Sundays. The show first aired in 1976.

"The first song I played on the show was 'Beat On The Brat', by the Ramones," recalls Bingenheimer. "And people were calling up wondering if I had the record on the wrong speed! They'd never heard anything like this before. And then of course I'd start playing bands from Los Angeles and getting that music out there for people to hear. So I'd be playing Black Flag and X – in fact, X made acetates for the show – and the Circle Jerks, the Bangs, the Dills, JFA (Jodie Foster's Army), Social Distortion, the Germs, the Go-Go's.

"Then came the 'Rodney On The Roq' compilation albums, of which there were three and which featured many of those bands. I just found it to be a really exciting time, and I felt really privileged to be able to play my part in getting the music heard. People have told me how important the show was to them, and that of course means a lot to me."

And how. Almost everyone contacted to participate in this article at some point in their interview mentions the name of Rodney Bingenheimer. It would be pure speculation to consider what Los Angeles punk rock might have grown, or shrunk, into without his influence.

LOS ANGELES is really a city unlike any other. For one, it has size; sprawling over an area at least four times the size of London and eight times the size of New York, with 15 million people busying themselves within its boundaries. There's almost no public transport, and people that do take the bus are looked upon as being inferior. So the question must be asked: if people had never heard bands from outside their section of the city, would they bother to travel for up to two hours to see them play?

"I used to listen to 'Rodney On The Roq' religiously," says Randy Bradbury, then a resident of Long Beach and now bassist with Huntington Beach's Pennywise, a second generation LA punk band whose success



Above: classic Social Distortion, from the back cover of 1983's 'Mommy's Little Monster' album
Right: Circle Jerks in full flight

PHOTO: LIF



PHOTO: LISA JOHNSON

is very much down to the work of the first. "I used to have an eight-track – by eight-track, I mean an eight-track tape recorder, one of the really old fashioned things – and I used to record the songs I liked on that eight-track. And believe me, there were a lot of songs that I used to record."

"Then if there was a band that we liked that was playing, we used to hop in this big wagon a friend of mine used to have and drive up to Hollywood to see them play. I tell you, we used to have about 20 people crammed into that thing. But it makes for some great memories. I saw X play, Black Flag, the Circle Jerks..."

"I used to listen to 'Rodney On The Roq' and it was incredible," says Greg Graffin. "He used to play all this music from the UK; bands like the Damned and of course the Sex Pistols. But what was possibly more important was that he used to play all this unknown stuff from Los Angeles. And that was such a revelation to me. I lived in the Valley (behind the Hollywood Hills), and I had absolutely no idea that all this stuff was going on just over the hills from where I lived. That was just incredible to me."

BUT NOTHING lasts forever. People who were there and who talk about the original LA punk scene speak of a community that was inspiring, unconventional and creative. This it may have been, but the music at least always had a darker tint to it.

Some of this may well have been the cartoon anarchy of a band like Fear – 'I piss on your warm embrace, I just want to come in your face', from 'Fresh Flesh', for example. But elsewhere the dusk seemed more genuine, with the Circle Jerks asking, 'Mrs America, how's your favourite son? Do you care just what he's done?'. And Black Flag warning, subversively, of a city where whites were the minority, not that it mattered to them because 'if (they) kept on doing this (they're) gonna end up dead' anyway.

If any song summed up the moral vacuum at the core of the Los Angeles scene it was 'Los Angeles' by X. This is the story of a real-life friend of Exene Cervenka – Farrah Fawcett Minor – who left the city to be with Captain Sensible while he toured England with The Damned. In the song the character becomes a shell of herself, drained of life by the very city she inhabited. She had 'started to hate every nigger and Jew and Mexican' – words she now uses, even though her mind knows better – who gave her shit, all the 'homosexuals and the idol rich'. As the song says, you can either 'change in an instant', or you can 'get out'. And the character in the song just had to get out.

By 1983 Los Angeles was not a punk scene in good health or good cheer. Three years earlier it had lost its *enfant terrible*, Darby Crash of the Germs, to a heroin overdose – reportedly a suicide pact in tribute to his hero, Sid Vicious, with his girlfriend who survived the ordeal. Crash died on December 7, 1980. One day before John Lennon was assassinated.

"Darby was like the kid brother you just couldn't help," says Exene Cervenka. "He was a

great person, a lovely person, but he was beyond helping. But I loved him very much. When he died we went on tour straight afterwards, and because of the death of John Lennon the whole country was concussed, just in terrible grief. I'm sure it was the same in England. And everywhere we went all you heard was John Lennon songs, songs like 'Imagine'. So every time I hear a John Lennon song now I think of Darby.

"I was so upset, but I was so pissed at him at the same time. As you can imagine you would be when someone does something like that. And not only does something like that, but does it the day before John Lennon dies as well. It's such a waste."

Another person who managed to develop a debilitating drug addiction was Mike Ness.

"I started so early (with drugs), like when I was 12 years old," he says. "Eventually I went on to harder things. I was into heroin for a good three or four years, and it was definitely an environmental thing. Growing up in suburbia (Orange County) meant that you really didn't have it around so much, but then we would go to the city and all that would change. Going to Hollywood, for us, was very exciting. You had skyscrapers and concrete and everything that comes with an urban scene. So it was definitely an influence. You get exposed to things, and a lot of things at that."

When was the first time you took heroin? "In 1982, when I was 19. I was probably in a rehearsal room, where people used to come down to watch us practice. You have to remember that in those days I had to drink for three hours just to get right, which was a lot of work just to feel comfortable. Whereas when I tried heroin I was like, 'Oh, this is so much easier!'. I used to feel like Sid Vicious, walking down the street. Back then, in the early days, I could feel the effect on \$10 worth. But that grew to a \$150 a day habit."

In one of the most famous stories from the period, Social Distortion were booked to play a New Year's show at the Café De Grande and Ness, to save himself the trouble, arranged for the band to be paid in heroin. This, after all, meant that he "wouldn't have to stop off on the way home". The remaining members of his group, furious and frustrated, handed in their notices with immediate effect.

"I was a very bad boy back then," he says. "I would steal things from the band just to keep myself in heroin. That was my thing. I didn't like to fight, but I did like the drugs. Although if a fight came along, then I wouldn't say no. I'd never back down."

WHICH IS just as well, because fights were becoming a regular occurrence in LA. Word had spread to certain sections of the city that punk rock was the hop for the cool set, and with it came a set of rules and conventions that the early protagonists simply didn't care to understand.

The scene was quickly annexed by gangs, who would latch themselves onto particular bands and fight with each other at shows. Fight over bands, over territory, over anything.

There would be the gangs from Huntington Beach – a particularly bad set, everyone interviewed mentions this location; the Hollywood crew – who later became the Los Angeles Death Squad (LADS); there were gangs from Ventura and a nasty collective from Venice Beach, turned on by the crossover fury of early Suicidal Tendencies.

"It became a nightmare," says Exene Cervenka. "People were getting beaten for no reason at all, just for the stupidest things. We did a show in Hollywood and John (Doe) had to pull this guy out of the crowd who was just getting beaten really badly. I don't know what would have happened to the guy had he not done that. So anyway, we had to get the guy onto the stage, and as soon as he gets up there he starts making these motions with his hands, kind of like Sylvester Stallone in the 'Rocky' movies. As you can imagine, many people in the crowd just wanted to kill him."

"But what happened is that the scene became full of people who, underneath the music and all, were basically jocks. And so they acted like jocks. They acted like sports fans."

"It was grim. It was just a cycle of violence that got out of control..." Randy Bradbury, Pennywise

Again, perhaps this shouldn't be a surprise. In 1980 the filmmaker Penelope Spheeris released a picture titled 'The Decline Of Western Civilization: The Punk Years', a documentary about the Los Angeles hotbed. Even during these early days, a fight breaks out during a performance of 'We're Desperate' by X, which vocalist John Doe deftly handles. Elsewhere, during a Fear concert, Lee Ving antagonizes the crowd to the point where what appears to be a woman attempts to climb onto the stage to confront him. Ving sees this and kicks the woman. Hard.

"Who let all these long hairs in here?" he asks, at the start of his band's set. "It's 1980, can't you afford a f**king haircut?"

But by the mid-'80s things were spinning beyond control. A fan was stabbed to death at an X gig and violence was becoming the rule.

"It was grim," says Pennywise's Randy Bradbury. "You know, at one time it was exuberant and then all of a sudden it was just really violent. And *dangerously* violent. The scene became infected by people who acted the way they thought they *should* act, which was violently. And new precedents were being set all the time. So people would hear about other people acting in violent ways at shows, and then they'd go out and try and beat that. It was just a cycle of violence that got out of control. And once you've lost control, then it's very difficult to get that control back."

Was this serious stuff?

"Oh yeah, it was very serious," confirms Greg Graffin. "A lot of very serious shit was

Left: Bad Religion onstage

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going on in the punk scene at the time. It was very frightening to go to a show and see gang fights erupt every single night. That really wasn't the point – to say the least – and that's not why we started this. And as a performer it was very disconcerting to be onstage when all this was going on.

"I basically think that people had lost touch with what was good about the scene, and I think you can mainly put that down to the gangs and to the violence. And the factions. People wanted to follow a band and not to be part of a gang. They didn't want to go to a show and then get caught up in gang violence. And who can blame them?"

SO THIS is what you have by 1988. An LA punk community that is an emaciated shadow of its former self, riven and plundered by violence, drugs, apathy and a startling loss of creative identity. The good bands have grown into other areas of honest music – X, always a restless sound, toning down the fury and growing into songwriters of some note; Black Flag, always stubborn, testing their audiences with spoken word material and long, awkward instrumental pieces – while the bad bands are changing their arm and trying their luck; TSOL – True Sound Of Liberty – have become a metal band; the Circle Jerks have become stale and calculated.

And glam-metal is everywhere. An evening on the Sunset Strip, the home of punk just a few years back, is an experience in disillusionment; dozens of hopeless bands and scheming, talentless throwaways attempting to suck a few cents from the Guns N'Roses dollar. Even a few of the good guys were caught up in this: Brian Baker – now with Bad Religion and once of the incendiary and timeless Minor Threat – dressed himself up like a fool with a band called Junkyard.

The picture, at least from a punk rock point of view, was perhaps best summed up by the band Motorcycle Boy and their song 'I Hate The Sunset Strip': 'I hate the Sunset Strip, heavy metal shit.'

It was into this sorry and cynical environment that Bad Religion released the album 'Suffer'. And, without question, saved Southern Californian punk rock from itself.

"In 1988 the punk scene was as anemic as death," recalls Brett Gurewitz, guitarist with the band. "When we were recording that album the environment was very discouraging for punk rock. Sub Pop (based in Seattle) at the time was becoming the very chic and trendy label, whereas punk rock was considered to be *passé* and certainly not hip or cool anymore. And that was the climate.

"In the punk rock world the stuff that was going on was not really representative of the Californian community. It was really a time when straight-edge and hardcore had come into its own – very shouty – and that was a scene that we never felt part of, or that we felt comfortable with. But I guess when 'Suffer' came out it really injected the scene with a shot of adrenalin."

It did more than that. Bad Religion had been on the radar for some time in the City Of Angels. In 1982 they released their first outing, 'How Could Hell Be Any Worse?' (with a picture of LA adorning the cover), and gained themselves a reputation as a young band of some promise. They'd formed at the start of the '80s, when Greg Graffin, a child of divorced academic parents from Canoga Park in the San Fernando Valley, met with Brett Gurewitz from Woodland Hills (also in the Valley) and broke bread over a shared love of progressive rock outfits such as Emerson, Lake and Palmer.

The band used to practice at Graffin's mum's house – Greg would spend the summer with his father in Wisconsin and describes his younger self as the epitome of uncool. But nothing could have prepared their audience for what they delivered with 'Suffer'. It had been five years and numerous line-up changes since the band's second album, 'Into The Unknown' – a so 'un-punk it's punk' collection of synthesizer-based songs that, if nothing else, showed the band to have a real streak of rebellion beating within them – and Bad Religion were

really doing nothing more than playing club shows to a few hundred people up and down the stops of California.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard 'Suffer'," says Pennywise's Randy Bradbury. "I mean, the scene at the time was in such a mess, there was really nothing left. You'd walk down Sunset Strip and all the guys would look like girls, all the good punk bands were gone, hair bands were everywhere. And then this album comes out. It doesn't sound like anything that's come before; it's intelligent, it's exciting, it's well written, the songs are great. It really brought the scene back to life for me and for a lot of other people."

Even today 'Suffer' is an astonishing record. But in the context of 1988 it must have been like a lungful of air to a drowning man. It has pace, it has energy, it has intelligence – something, at the time, the punk scene was flogging off as bankrupt stock – and it had a belief and an assurance that even fans of the band had no right to expect. 'Flipside' magazine voted their album of the year, as did the Berkeley punk rock 'bible' 'Maximum Rock 'N' Roll'.

"Whenever we make our landmark records it's when Brett's and my creativity flows together," says Greg Graffin. "Suffer" was a very natural record for us. We wanted to take the elements that were good from our earlier work and not to stray too far from that. I think with all the violence and the lack of any philosophical foundation that had helped the punk scene to crumble, we wanted to do something that would stand out from that and that would help us stand apart from that."

At the time, 'Suffer' sold 12,000 copies. But it created the impetus not only for Bad Religion themselves to move on – two albums later and the band were selling 100,000 copies of their 'Against The Grain' set, and five years on from that they were selling 850,000 albums in one year with 'Stranger Than Fiction' – but provided an inspiration to a new generation of bands who have erupted in the years since. Bands such as Green Day, Pennywise, NOFX and Rancid.

"Do I think that Bad Religion kept the punk scene alive?" asks Brett Gurewitz. "Yes I do. Everybody tells me that and so now I believe it. At the time I realised there was something happening. There were two bands that were really contributing to the independent scene in the late '80s and early '90s, and that was Fugazi and Bad Religion. And I think what you're seeing today is a result of what Fugazi and Bad Religion did back then. I think it's a direct result of that."

IN ANY normal sense, this wouldn't be too bad an ending to the story. After all, following a fallow period, the Los Angeles punk community got itself back on its Converse boots and began to dance – in a circle, arms flailing – to some great music once again. It was as popular as it had ever been and as independent as it had ever been.

In the years following 'Suffer', bands had begun to emerge to replace the old, lost faces and sounds and life was pumping wildly around the community's veins once again. But there's a better ending, which provided unrestrained joy for anyone interested in punk rock music and an independent ideal.

Aside from being in Bad Religion, Brett Gurewitz, of course, also runs his record label Epitaph. He got the name from a King Crimson song. The money he got to start the label came from a \$1,500 loan from his father, Richard, in order that he could release the first Bad Religion record, 'How Could Hell Be Any Worse?'. For years the label was run out of a closet at the Westbeach Recorder studio in Hollywood, sometimes clicking into life to release Bad Religion records, other times shutting down to nothing more than a name.

By the end of the 1980s, though, Epitaph had begun to sign other bands such as NOFX, L7, the Little Kings, Down By Law and SNFU, releasing independent records and shipping them through independent distributors. Commercial success for Epitaph in those days was measured in the thousands or, if they were lucky, in the tens of thousands. But the label

ran along nicely, providing home and shelter for bands too small for the majors yet too big for their boots.

One of the bands Brett Gurewitz signed went by the name of The Offspring. Their first album for Epitaph, 'Ignition', had been a moderate success. Their second album was called 'Smash'. Which is what it became.

"I remember when The Offspring turned in the finished record to me, I was driving home listening to it in my car," says Brett Gurewitz. "At the time I was living with my then wife, Maggie, in North Hollywood, and I remember driving around the neighbourhood and circling about 10 times, listening to these two songs, '...Come Out And Play' and 'Low Self Esteem'. And I just couldn't believe it; they sounded like massive hits to me. I really couldn't believe it. I was like, 'Oh my God!'. And when I walked into my house I said to my wife, 'Hi Honey, I'm home. By the way, we're gonna be rich!'"

Brett Gurewitz claims he has his tongue in his cheek here. What he probably means is, if The Offspring were on a major label then they would rocket to stardom. But they weren't on a major, they were on an indie, and the radio didn't play songs released on independent labels, let alone punk rock songs. Nevermind. Still, in a spirit of 'if you don't buy a ticket then you'll never win the lottery', Gurewitz hired a promotions man, Mike Jacobs, to plug '...Come Out And Play' as a single. Within days it was on the A-list playlist of KROQ, which led to other stations picking up the song. Which, in turn, led to MTV playing The Offspring's \$5,000 video (it was shot in a garage) "every five minutes". Within weeks '...Come Out And Play' had become the Number One video on MTV and

"What you're seeing today is a direct result of what Bad Religion and Fugazi did back then..."
Brett Gurewitz, Bad Religion

the Number One song on radio. This situation was absolutely without precedent.

"That really was a crazy time," recalls Offspring singer Dexter Holland. "You know, we didn't start this band to get rich or famous, that really wasn't on the agenda. We'd toured with NOFX and seen that it was possible to make a living making this kind of music, and so that really was the extent of our ambitions. When the whole thing took off it really just passed us by and we remained wide-eyed through the whole thing. We went on tour and Greg (K, bassist) was still living with his mom. Noodles (guitarist) was still working as a janitor at an elementary school. We were like, 'Noodles, I think you can give up your job now!'"

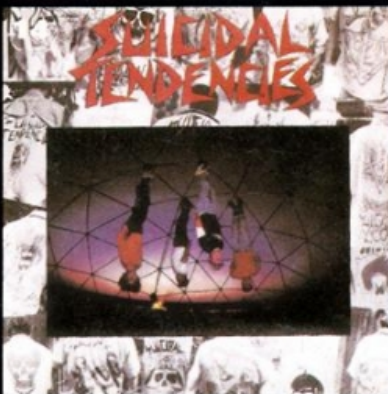
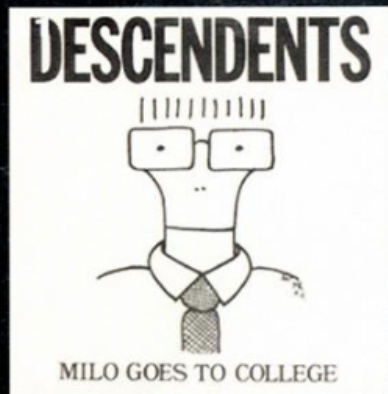
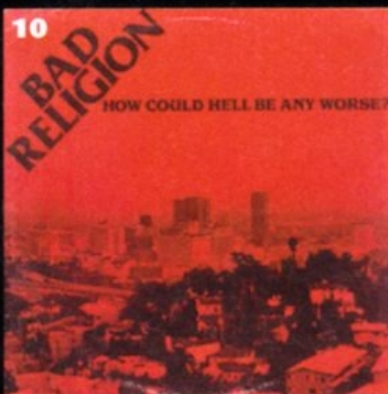
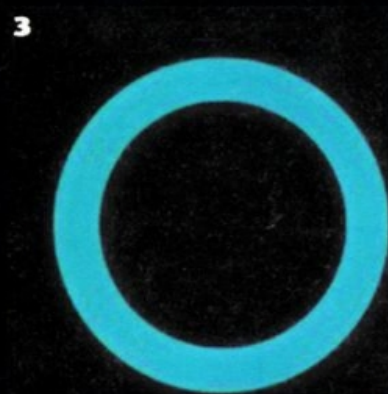
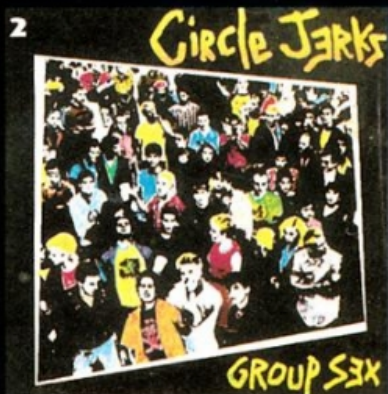
"When the song was playlisted on KROQ and MTV, that's when the orders for the album came in, not only from all over the country but from all over the world," says Gurewitz. "And I sold them as fast as I could make them. But the problem was getting the money to print the records. So I had to take out loans. I had to mortgage my house and had to beg, borrow and steal and do everything I could to get the job done. I was at great personal risk of financial ruin. I can't remember how much I had to drum up, but it was certainly more than I had ever had, you know? It was hundreds of thousands of dollars. I could have easily lost my house."

"I remember we had palates of the Offspring's 'Smash' piled in every inch of the Epitaph warehouse, which at the time was on Santa Monica Boulevard, at the junction of Santa Monica and Vine. We had records stacked from the floor to the ceiling – you couldn't even breathe in there – and we had trucks pulling up hour after hour to take delivery. And we still didn't have enough room, so we had to rent more space downtown just to house 'Smash' records. And still the demand kept increasing... By now they were playing the song at football games, at hockey games, in



9 OF ANGEL





- Damaged!**
Essential LA punk rock albums
1979-1994...
1. Dickies 'The Incredible Shrinking Dickies' (1979, Oil Man)
 2. Circle Jerks 'Group Sex' (Frontier, 1980)
 3. The Germs 'GI' (Slash, 1980)
 4. Various 'Rodney On The ROQ' (Posh Boy, 1980)
 5. Adolescents 'Adolescents' (1981, Frontier)
 6. Agent Orange 'Living In Darkness' (Posh Boy, 1981)
 7. Black Flag 'Damaged' (SST, 1981)
 8. T.S.O.L. 'Dance With Me' (Frontier, 1980)
 9. X 'Los Angeles' (Slash, 1981)
 10. Bad Religion 'How Could Hell Be Any Worse?' (Epitaph, 1982)
 11. Descendents 'Milo Goes To College' (New Alliance, 1982)
 12. Fear 'The Record' (Slash, 1982)
 13. Social Distortion 'Mommy's Little Monster' (13th Floor, 1983)
 14. Suicidal Tendencies 'Suicidal Tendencies' (Frontier, 1983)
 15. Various Artists 'Repo Man Original Soundtrack' (MCA, 1984)
 16. Bad Religion 'Suffer' (Epitaph, 1988)
 17. All 'Breaking Things' (Cruz, 1993)
 18. The Offspring 'Smash' (Epitaph, 1994)



▶ shopping malls, in elevators. Well, by then I didn't need to take loans anymore. The pressing plants said, 'Look, we can see this thing is selling. You don't need to pay us upfront'.

"And it was selling. In the end, 'Smash' went on to sell something like 10 million copies. And not only is it the best-selling Epitaph album, but it's also the best-selling Offspring album. It's sold more than any of the records they've put out (since moving to a major label)."

Today, 'Smash' is the best-selling independent release of all time. By a mile. And it's a punk rock record.

"We didn't start this band to get rich or famous, that wasn't on the agenda..."
Dexter Holland, The Offspring

THE OFFSPRING, along with Green Day, went on to form the vanguard of the Californian branch of the punk rock industry. Bad Religion, NOFX and Rancid went on to make music that was just as good as any of the bands mentioned above. Labels exist to throw this music out; labels such as Fat Wreck Chords and Nitro. A whole ranch of other groups – some good, some not so good – went on to considerable fame and equal fortune plying a form of music that, much to everyone's astonishment, had suddenly gone mainstream.

It's not often that things come together like

this, that a whole movement survives and prospers not only in a creative sense but also in a commercial one. And for this reason alone – despite reservations some may have about an occasionally homogenized sound, about a lack of artistic risk or the almost complete absence of women from the movement – the LA punk scene is in as good health now as it ever was.

"I would like to think that the bands of the Los Angeles scene – the bands that came before the success that followed – are responsible for tilling the soil, so to speak," concludes

Brett Gurewitz. "Personally, I can't take too much credit for what happened with a band such as The Offspring, but I can take credit for putting out 'Suffer' and 'No Control' and 'Against The Grain'. And other people can take credit for what they did with their bands as well. I think that's what I – and we – have to offer. And for that, I'm very proud." ●

BAD RELIGION release their new album, **'The Process Of Belief'**, through Epitaph on January 21.

Above: pre-'Smash' Offspring on the verge of greatness
Below: the typical scene at a you average LA punk gig

