

Teenage Alcoholics: Punk Rock in East Los Angeles

Dedicated to the memory of Jason "Boomer" Escovedo

Prologue

We get to the gig around 9:30 p.m. We had walked, a pack of 12 or 13 kids with spiked hair, faded denim jackets covered in a chaotic splash of color and band logos, and assorted cases of beer in tow, more than a mile through neighborhoods often hostile to people like us. We pay \$3 just to stand in a backyard filled to capacity, get drunk and raise a little hell as our friends line up in varying band formations every half hour or so and tear through their sets, their efforts lit by a single lamp strategically placed on the makeshift stage at the back wall of the house. After a little searching through the yard, we find the other heads from the neighborhood, who had come to the gig in two carloads, in the far corner with a keg between them.

"We" are collectively the punks from City Terrace, but we are by no means alone in the backyard. Kids from Montebello, Huntington Park, Alhambra, El Sereno, Monterey Park and other areas have also come out tonight to see the Stains, who are rumored to be making a very rare appearance. I make my way through the crowd, can of Bud in hand, place my very scrawny self squarely in front of the stage and begin heckling the members of Side Effects, who were friends from Whittier.

"You guys are too stupid to play and your drummer is a gimp," I shout at them through the din of tuning instruments. Behind me, another critic chimes in with "Go back to Whittier you has-been scumbags."

Their singer smiles. "Glad to see you guys, too," he deadpans into the microphone. Their drummer four-clicks and, as the band begins their first song, the backyard erupts into the sea of ritualized violence that we call dancing. Many fall to the ground, but are quickly picked up by watchful friends and relatives. Somewhere in the middle of the set, I make my way back toward the keg, parched, sweaty and loving every minute of the night. Two bands later, my brother informs me that he has talked one of the bands into lending us their equipment and that we will be playing after Anti-Social, who are currently onstage. We find Scott, our singer, and make our way back toward the stage.

Anti-Social finishes up and we tune up the borrowed instruments. We're ready. Scott introduces us as "just another band from East LA" and we begin our set in a hail of reciprocated insults from the members of Side Effects and a shower of wasted beer.

East Los Angeles: A Primer

"We're the ones that have been neglected/Conformity never accepted..." Black Jax

East Los Angeles has always been sort of the bastard child of Los Angeles "proper," which extends from the bridges that cross the Los Angeles River to the Pacific Ocean (officially, the eastern border of Los Angeles City is Indiana Street, which is in the heart of "East Los," but, except for the LAPD, few Angelenos seem to acknowledge this fact). Everything on the other side of the river, pretty much since the beginning of the last century, has been viewed by the population on the west side as either squalid, dangerous or simply someplace decent people would not be caught dead in, day or night. As a result,

vast amounts of people on the west side of Los Angeles have, in their entire lives, never set foot in East Los Angeles. Conversely, much of the population on the east side of the river has regularly made trips over the bridges, serving as a source of cheap labor for the city's businesses and more affluent residents.

Contrary to popular belief, East Los Angeles has never been a solely Mexican area. Granted, East LA is considered the largest Mexican city outside of Mexico, but, in addition to the Mexicans who have lived in the area, much of LA's Japanese, Italian, Chinese, Russian, Central American, Black and Jewish populations have also called parts of East LA home through the years. In fact, Los Angeles' noted "Fairfax District" was the result of the area's Jews moving from Boyle Heights following the influx of other minority groups into the area. The more inquisitive reader can find out more about the area's history in the book *East Los Angeles: Anatomy of a Barrio*, by Ricardo Romo.

To this day, the general attitude of West Siders toward East LA seems to be that, aside from "safe" areas like Pasadena and San Marino, it simply doesn't exist. Fodor's tourist guides that do mention the outlying areas warn their buyers to avoid dangerous areas like East and South Central Los Angeles, especially at night. When referring to the "east side," local publications like the *LA Weekly* and the *New Times* are actually referring to Silverlake, which is still on the "west side." There is some truth to the belief that places like East and South Central Los Angeles can be risky areas on occasion, but they are no more hazardous than more celebrated tourist traps, like Hollywood Boulevard or the Venice Boardwalk.

While it is easy to blame the rest of the county's aversion to East Los Angeles on the ominous spectre of racism, and its origins were no doubt based on the white population's fear of its minority neighbors rising up and killing them in their sleep, I think that it has since mutated into something less sinister over the course of generations. Gone are the days when the Mexican population, not allowed on the beaches, instead took their families to water-filled rock quarries and aqueducts with names like Marrano Beach and Sleepy Lagoon, but the aversion on the part of much of the rest of the county is still very much alive. While most of the County's constituency probably forgot long ago why East LA was originally such a bad place to be, they have nevertheless retained the fear that was the end product of the racism.

As a result, the efforts of Eastside artists, from painters to writers, actors to musicians, are rarely recognized. For every Los Lobos, Anthony Quinn or Vicky Carr, there are a hundred Ruben & the Jets, Mestizo, Con Safos, and so on. Many bands found it nearly impossible to play outside of the neighborhoods and, as far as playing a coveted club date in, say, Hollywood – forget about it.

This bias is equally true of the Los Angeles punk scene. Most, if not all, of the LA bands that the average punker has heard of are from Hollywood, Orange County or the South Bay. East LA punk bands had a hard time getting gigs with their west side counterparts in the early days and, come to think of it, that hasn't really changed much, either. East LA bands are still seen as somehow less "real" and are often dismissed as "taco punk" or with some other stupid slight. For example, a recent review of the local band Union 13 in another magazine consisted of the reviewer trying to figure out how a punk band from LA could exist without his knowing it, followed by a dismissal of them as some sort of made-up group that Brett Gurewitz concocted to cash in on the "Spanish rock" craze sweeping the nation. In actuality, the group had been recording demos and

slugging it out in East Los' backyard party scene years before the release of their first album. Early bands that did regularly get shows outside of East Los Angeles and released vinyl were often tied in some way to "movers and shakers" within the "real" LA punk scene. For example, East LA group the Brat's debut EP, "Attitudes," was released on Tito Larriva's (of the Hollywood band the Plugz) Fatima label. The record's lyric sheet was handwritten by X's Exene Cervenka.

Even worse, East LA music historians themselves are equally culpable for slighting the work of the area's punk and underground bands. Every few years, some Chicano musicologist or music historian-cum-Tower Records employee will try to put out the "definitive" history of the East Los Angeles music scene. For the most part, their efforts are commendable, but, for some reason, once they get to the section covering the East LA punk and underground scene, their work suddenly gets anemic. The two bands most often mentioned are the Brat and Los Illegals, and according to many of these books, that's the alpha and omega of East LA's punk scene. Nothing before, after or in between. If they do attempt to mention any other "East LA" punk bands, they find bands with ethnic names or members from other areas and try to lump them in with the others (e.g. the persistent tendency to place the Chula Vista Chicano punk band the Zeros in with their East LA counterparts; the reference to Econochrist alter ego Chicano Christ in the book *Land of a Thousand Dances*).

Despite efforts by others to prove otherwise, East LA has long been home to a large, vibrant punk and underground music scene, one as diverse and exciting as any of Los Angeles' more celebrated scenes, and it has somehow prospered despite virtually no radio airplay, precious few recorded works, almost no labels and a few short-lived clubs. Like many of its more famous counterparts, the East LA scene was comprised of many smaller scenes that freely intermingled with each other. Although elitism and infighting between bands, fans and scenesters were often in abundance, they rarely impeded the basic tenet of the efforts of those involved, which was to have as much fun as possible by any means necessary.

What follows is in no way an attempt to serve as a document of every punk band that has plugged in and made noise in a garage east of the LA River, nor is it to serve as some sort of "definitive history of a scene." Rather, look at this long block of lettering as an introduction to a scene that was and is populated by a whole host of denizens that I'm willing to bet most reading this have never heard of.

The "family tree" that accompanies this article began as a request by Retodd to map out the bands I have been a part of over the years as a starting point for a larger tree that will hopefully include as many East LA bands as possible. There are tons of other bands I had hoped to include in this text, as well as on the family tree, but due to friends who have disappeared through that vortex called time, those who have died, those afflicted with terminal flakiness or just a general lack of interest on the part of those I called to participate, I was unable to make it any more detailed. Anyone from the area reading this who has been or is in a band and is interested in being included on the tree are encouraged to contact this magazine.

Due to the dearth of related material on the subject, much of the information here comes from at least 20 years worth of memories spanning hundreds of parties, gigs and fights in assorted backyards, clubs, rented halls, living rooms and other subterranean hellholes where one finds all the fun stuff going on. While it is true that I have played in

many bands over the course of the last 20 years, the intent of this article is not an arrogant attempt to highlight my personal efforts as a musician. I know full well that my efforts are no more (or less) important than those of others. The problem is that punk was and is a hands-on type of subculture, where everybody involved plays an active part and, as a result, much of the history of punk in East LA and my own personal history are interrelated.

The reader will note that Los Illegals and the Brat are not represented here. This is in no way an attempt to dismiss or disrespect their efforts, but, to be honest, they've been the primary focus of all things "punk" in East LA and both have had more than their share of days in the sun. Now it's someone else's turn.

A Brief Personal Recollection of East LA Punk Life

The first time I remember seeing the phrase "punk rock" was in a 1980 issue of *Creem*. I had bought the magazine because of articles on the Pretenders and Devo, who at the time had replaced my prior fascination with Kiss and other related hard rock bands. The classified ads in the back of the magazine had repeated references to punk rock T-shirts, sunglasses and even an ad for a "punk rock," which was a variation on the ridiculous pet rock craze that swept the United States in the late 1970s.

I went to an "alternative" school (as in an "alternative form of education," according to the hippies that founded the school in the '70s) in Highland Park. Like many of the kids who attended this school, my younger brother and I were bused there from where we lived, which was an area of East LA called City Terrace. Through some of the other kids in school, I soon learned of punk and a whole world of bands I had no idea existed. Bands with strange names like the Weirdos, Germs, Go-Gos, Flesh Eaters and Black Flag. I also learned of a radio station with some DJ named Rodney who regularly played these bands. My brother and I began listening to Rodney's show every Saturday and Sunday night.

The first "band" I ever saw was the Alperheads, a joke band named after a classmate who was one of the editors of *Ink Disease* fanzine. The bass player for the Alperheads was Shane White, who later became a member of the Rip Offs. If memory serves, the band practiced their three-song set only once, the night before their gig, and they played only that one show, which took place in our school's recreation room. As they crooned the mantra "We are young, we are bold, we are Alperheads/Nobody loves us but our mothers" to the three half-learned chords that made up the music, I couldn't help but think that they were the worst band I had ever heard. Two of their friends, who had snuck onto the campus just to see them, began pogoing, bouncing up and down to the beat, laughing the whole time.

I didn't begin wearing many of the stereotypical punk accoutrements until a couple of years later, but I did begin my involvement in the scene not long after that show in the rec room. Although neither of us knew how to play an instrument, my brother and I started our first band sometime in the summer of 1981. My gear consisted of an acoustic guitar and, in order to make it "electric," I took a tape recorder microphone, wrapped it in toilet paper, plugged it into an old movie projector, and then shoved the mic into the sound hole of the guitar. The sound that resulted, besides the incessant feedback, was similar to two trains colliding in the middle of an earthquake. My brother screamed at the top of his lungs. We made tapes and gave them to friends. It was fun. A couple of years later, we borrowed some real equipment from an aunt, talked a schoolmate (a Chinese girl who

had no apparent sense of rhythm) into playing drums and played Dollar Night at the Cathay de Grande in Hollywood with Mad Parade, the Membranes and the Steps. I also began writing for friends' fanzines, not to mention frequent failed attempts at starting my own.

My brother and I soon learned that being a punk in East LA was no spring walk in the park. More often than not, it involved suffering through cat-calls, incessant hassling from parent, police and principal alike, running from people bent on our destruction, fighting, beatings, concussions and bleeding. Soon enough, though, we found other punks in the neighborhood and we all began hanging out together and going to shows. Together, we all started bands, supported each others' efforts, wrote for each others' magazines, ingested staggering amounts of illicit substances and beverages that would've made Nancy Reagan squirm, and put on our own shows.

The Written Word

Of the many fanzines that popped up over the years, the two that are best known by punks outside the East LA area are *Ink Disease* and *Pure Filth*. Both were very influential, outspoken and sometimes brutally honest in their likes and dislikes. Both were often painfully funny to read. Both also had more than their share of both worshippers and enemies.

For the majority of its existence, *Ink Disease* was headed by the duo of Thomas Siegal and Steve Alper. It was based in the Mount Washington area of Northeast LA. Although the majority of its coverage was more national in scope, the occasional feature could be found on their friends' bands, like Armistice and Truce. In its early stages, *Ink Disease* was similar in style to many other fanzines of the time, with chaotic layouts, poorly reproduced photos, and the like. In addition to interviews with bands and record reviews, one could find reviews of old movies that were playing at Pasadena's Rialto Theatre, copy clipped out of various newspapers, "The Adventures of Punk and Pop" comics and Brady Rifkin's bumper sticker reviews. As it gained popularity (at one point rivaling *Flipside*), its layouts and text became more coherent and the general vibe of the fanzine became considerably more focused. *Ink Disease* continued into the 1990s, but it began reaching the newsstands only sporadically, first seemingly at quarterly intervals, then almost annually, and it finally disappeared.

Pure Filth was an entirely different beast. The brainchild of Shane White, Ralph Balcarcel and the enigmatic Carl Bellows, *Pure Filth* was unashamedly regional, outspoken to the point of insulting even their friends, elitist, crude and funny as hell. The only thing truly painstakingly laid out was usually the cover, which featured women whom the editors deemed sexy. Past that, though, the reader was left to his/her own devices to figure out what was going on. Following an entirely handwritten first issue, the magazine's text was typeset on an old typewriter with missing keys, laid out in whatever direction seemed interesting and then Xeroxed en masse. The bands interviewed were usually unknown, and the interviews themselves often quickly degenerated into recordings of situations having nothing to do with the bands' music. Typical questions ran along the lines of, "Some people get up at the crack of dawn. Whose crack do you get up to?" As for as the magazine's other contents, the reader could wade through Ralph's semi-autobiographical "Adventures of the Hookermeister;" "On Skinheads," a list of their friends who either were or would soon be suffering from male pattern baldness; a

sometimes painfully personal gossip section; diatribes on how *Flipside* and punk rock in general sucked; reviews of literally anything; and assorted toilet humor comics. When Ralph, Shane and his brother Jason packed up their band and moved up to the Bay Area, they took *Pure Filth* with them and continued to put out issues until it became a little more popular than they were comfortable with, at which time they packed it in and Shane began writing reviews for *Maximum Rocknroll*.

There were, of course, a great many other fanzines from East Los Angeles, including *Multiplication of the Typical Joe*, *Outcry*, *Local Anesthetic* and *Thrasher's Digest*. Most of them started out strong and then sort of petered out after a few issues. All of them, however, were essential in helping to inform those few readers outside the area of what was going on in the neighborhoods.

Backyard Shenanigans

Although there was the occasional punk club in East Los Angeles, most were short-lived. The club that survived the longest was the Vex, which was forced to move around the area for various reasons and was eventually closed after someone was stabbed. This lack of a steady club scene in the area, not to mention the virtual impossibility of a band obtaining a slot at any of Hollywood's clubs, led to the rise of the backyard party.

The mechanics were simple: Find someone with parents who were either gullible or out of town, make flyers, pass them out at the Olympic Auditorium, Fenders Ballroom and anywhere else you could, show up at the house with a couple of kegs of beer, play, dance, fight, leave when the cops crashed the party and find someplace else to finish the beer, usually an alley close to home. For three bucks or less, one could see, depending on when and if the cops showed up, anywhere from one to eight bands play.

A steady network of backyards began to build, places with names like Bird and Cornwell, First and Velasco, Beastie's Pad, Boo-Boo's House, Joe's Pit, Flipper's Pad and the Dustbowl (so named because a stifling cloud of dirt would rise every time a slam pit started). Soon one could find a place to go on any given day of the weekend. Many of the places lasted years and the parties themselves were usually wild, drunken, sometimes violent affairs. Most, if not all, of the bands got paid, either with money or lots of free beer. Few complained about this arrangement.

Shut Up and Play

As with any other scene, East LA bands were plentiful and usually short-lived. Some were brilliant, others were, to be as polite as possible, absolutely terrible, but all were respected and encouraged to make as much noise as possible. The bands were also very incestuous, and it wasn't uncommon for one person to be in four or five different bands at the same time with three other people, each of them in the same predicament.

Few of the bands went into a proper studio and even fewer ever released a proper record. Most instead made demo cassettes on either a four-track recorder or a ghetto blaster, copied them onto cheap tapes and passed them out to friends or sold them. A handful of other would-be music moguls sometimes took these demos, picked a few songs from each tape, recorded them onto other cheap cassettes and passed them off as compilations.

The following is an *incomplete* list and brief descriptions of some East LA-area bands area active from 1981-1990. Please note the emphasis on incomplete.

A.D. Do – An early to mid-'80s Highland Park group, this band included Benny Siegal and Morgan Hunt, both of whom were responsible for *Multiplication of the Typical Joe* fanzine. Inspired by the same sense of humor that permeated their fanzine, their early recordings were of a “fun” nature, but as the influence of DC hardcore bands like Minor Threat and Faith became more prevalent, they developed a harder edge. Aside from a few garage demos, their only other known appearance was on the “Flex Your Mom” compilation cassette, of which there were only 30 or so “legitimate” copies. Morgan moved to Humboldt County, where he is now a member of the band Letterbomb.

Anti-Social – Originally a non-band that would get their name on flyers and then not show up to play, “because we’re anti-social.” Heavily influenced by Bad Religion before it became fashionable, the band was started by guitarist Manny and his brother Charlie after Manny quit Copulation. They released a couple of demos and garnered a pretty sizable following before throwing in the towel. Manny later formed the Deutschmen, Revolution 9 and played for a time in Media Blitz.

Armistice – One of LA’s early “peace punk” bands. Taking many of their political cues from Crass, Crucifix and the like, they tried to get LA’s notoriously apathetic punk scene to care about *something*. Noteworthy members included drummers Aaron (of kiddie punk band Mad Society), Sard (later in Black Jax) and guitarist Ivan Morely (later of Iconoclast). The only recordings I know of were a live demo recorded at Roxanne’s Club and some tracks on the “Rock for the People of Highland Park” compilation cassette.

Black Jax – The best thing ever to come out of Monterey Park. Their sound was a mixture of English punk rock circa 1977 and early '80s Orange County hardcore, and they didn’t have a bad song in their set. Singer Pogo commanded the stage like a pro, emoting every line while bouncing across every inch of the stage. The band officially broke up in 1986, but they have reunited occasionally over the years, and Pogo fronted an all-new lineup in the mid '90s. A collection of two old demos by this band was recently legitimately released on disc by Wankin’ Stiph records.

Bloodcum – Two of the members of this band were related to members of speed metal band Slayer, so they were often facetiously referred to as the “Slayer Brother Band.” Their dedication to playing shows was the stuff of legend. Bassist Robert Tovar once had his legs broken by neighborhood gang members, but he still continued to play shows despite the obvious difficulties of standing in two casts. The early work of this Huntington Park band was hardcore at its most aggressive and, although they later introduced more of a metal influence into their sound, they managed to retain their punk edge. In addition to some demos, Bloodcum released a couple of 12-inch EPs on Wild Rag records. Robert Tovar is now a guitarist in Blues Experiment and two of the other members were last rumored to be playing in an industrial metal band with Gabriel from Our Band Sucks.

C.O. (Conscientious Objector) – An ultra-hardcore thrash band featuring the infamous Batman on vocals. Their sets often sounded like a roar of noise with only brief stops to let the audience know that they were beginning a new song. C.O., to my

knowledge, only recorded one demo and rumor has it that Batman has become pastor at a Christian church after years of living a very dangerous life.

Chainsaw Blues/the Fingers – The *Pure Filth* house band(s). Chainsaw Blues was originally a punk rock alter ego of sorts to the band La Triste, but following the departure of Craig Tyron, the inclusion of Plain Agony singer Tito Lopez and Shane's introduction to Billy Childish records, the band rapidly became a force unto itself. After a year or so, the personnel shuffled, Brady Rifkin was given vocal duties and the band was re-christened The Fingers. Later, Brady was booted out, bassist Ralph became the singer and Becky Minjarez took up bass chores. When Becky quit to become a mom, the Fingers became a three-piece unit. After gaining considerable popularity outside of East LA, the band moved to San Francisco and promptly broke up. Shane and Jason joined the Rip Offs and the rest, as they say, is history. Chainsaw Blues' recorded output consists of one demo and a 7-inch EP. The Fingers released at least three 7-inch EPs

Circle One – One of East LA's best-known, best-documented and most controversial groups. Singer John Macias was a very charismatic figure in the LA punk scene whose love for Jesus, outspokenness, hatred of police and unflagging dedication to hardcore both rubbed more than a few people the wrong way and attracted a rabid following/gang, known as the "Family." Their music, with its frenetic beats and John's meticulous efforts to actually sing, was undeniably powerful. Circle One's vinyl appearances are many. The most recent release is "Are You Afraid?" on Grand Theft Audio, which couples their first album with live tracks, various demos and compilation cuts. Guitarist Mike Vallejo has since been in seemingly nearly every hardcore band from LA to Oxnard and various other members have been in Fluf, Fifi and Corpus Delecti. John, sadly, was shot to death by police on Santa Monica Pier in the early 1990s.

Crankshaft – Another well-known group led by the legendary Leno Lousy. Leno's decidedly non-PC lyrical content (odes to "new wave homos," armies of the dead and raping girl scouts) no doubt caused many an eyebrow to raise (not to mention destruction of punk records by irate parents), but their metal-tinged hardcore was top-notch. Most of the band's vinyl output consists of tracks on various Mystic Records comps, three cuts on Smoke 7's "Sudden Death" compilation and a host of demos. Rumor has it that Leno is doing a long prison stretch these days. It is not known what happened to rest of the original members.

Dog's Breakfast – An early "bedroom" group consisting of Jim Vavrik, Shane and Jason White. They recorded one known demo, which dances a fine line between early punk rock minimalism and flat-out noise. Three tracks from the demo, "V.D. in Your Eye," "Destroy" and "The Children Don't Play" appeared on the "Flex Your Mom" cassette compilation.

FCDN Tormentor – From Highland Park circa the mid-1980s, these guys were early purveyors of what would become known as black metal. The "FCDN," placed at the beginning of their name to differentiate them from another band with the same name, stood for "Fuckin' Catastrophic Destructive Noise," and the description definitely fit. Their sound was loud, fast and featured the same strangled-cat vocals still popular today. They put out at least one demo and rumor has it that they still play shows occasionally. Drummer Raul went on to play in No Comment and is now drummer for Blues Experiment.

Fish Head – Formed in the late '80s/early '90s, Fish Head married the death rock of bands like the Bauhaus to blues and hardcore punk and came up with a sound all their own. Song subjects ranged from Manson-esque fantasies to hanging hippies to telling a girl's parents in gory detail what sex with their daughter was like. They quickly began to garner notoriety outside of the neighborhood, but after drummer Randy Rodarte moved to Berkeley, attempts to keep the momentum going with a new drummer failed and they called it quits. The band recorded one demo, and a live cassette recorded at a 4th of July party exists, and that's pretty much their recorded output. A single was allegedly scheduled to be recorded by the Plugz' Tito Larriva and released on Flipside Records, but nothing ever came of it. Randy went on to drum in the Tumors for a time, and continues to this day as one of the only original members left in the band Ollin. Bassist Ralph was last seen booking punk shows at the Tropico Club in East LA. Guitarist Joey is lost in the void. Later drummer Guy still jams with his brother on occasion. Singer John is married and has two kids.

Fuckin' Assholes – The fact that none of the members of this band could really play their instruments didn't stop them from playing many a backyard show. Their sets usually consisted of singer Chris screaming about being a teenage alcoholic or repeating the phrase "You're just a caca head" repeatedly while the rest of the band flailed on their instruments in wild abandon. After a while, one of the members would walk off mid-set to get a beer and someone from the crowd would go up and play. The band recorded two known demos. Most of the members eventually learned to play and went on to Butt Acne, Peace Pill and Fish Head.

Hawaii's Hardcore – From the ashes of No Mind Asylum came this, Highland Park's premier straight edge band, although few (if any) of their songs had anything to do with straight edge. The members performed in Hawaiian shirts and had crossed palm trees drawn onto their hands instead of the stereotypical "X." Song subjects ranged from biographies of horny old movie stars to hating peace punks to loving Madonna. One demo was recorded and tracks from it were released on the "Rock for the People of Highland Park" and "Flex Your Mom" compilation cassettes. Shane White and Craig Tyron went on to an incarnation of Laughing Matter. Guitarist Steve Stewart moved to Spokane. Singer Joe Henderson went on to write for *Flipside* and, according to popular rumor, is now some sort of right-wing gun freak.

HCOT/Copulation LA – Without a doubt, one of East LA's best hardcore bands. The name Hot Cum on Tongue was shortened to HCOT and then to Copulation. When the band found out there was a band in Sweden or somewhere with the same name, they added "LA" to avoid potential confusion. Bassist/singer Johnny "Boots" Rodriguez and drummer Frank, along with a revolving door of guitarists, laid out some solid songs that came an went in a blur of anger and desperation. After Frank eventually left the band, Boots tried to keep the band going, but it eventually sputtered out and he joined the Thrusters, Plain Agony and a later incarnation of the Black Jax. The band recorded numerous demos and was scheduled to have some tracks on the "Flex Your Burrito" cassette comp, which was allegedly never completed. Two Copulation tracks, "Tina Tina (renamed "Baby")" and "What a Drag," were "liberated" by the band Anti-Social and recorded for their first demo, much to the consternation of Boots.

Human Retch/Six Gun Justice/Butt Acne – The first foray into the world of music that my brother and I made, Human Retch was the name that we gave the unskilled noise

that we created. Following the inclusion of the tone-deaf drummer, we changed the name to Six Gun Justice and survived two shows. Aside from the show at the Cathay de Grande, Six Gun Justice's only other live performance was at a very small slumber party for seventh-grade girls. We got paid a bowl of spaghetti each for that show. After another name change, this time to Butt Acne, the band went through a succession of lineups before finally settling on my brother John on drums, Scott from the Fuckin' Assholes on bass and myself on guitar. This lineup lasted into the 1990s when performances became fewer and Scott moved to Berkeley for a time. Aside from a legion of demo tapes, the most recent from 1998, Butt Acne's only "official" output was one side of a split cassette with Venice's Voice of Authority, which was released by a Chicago tape label in the mid-'80s. The band members that floated through Butt Acne went on to join such bands as Fish Head, Tumors, Peace Pill, Ollin and Mad Parade.

Insurrected State/No Church on Sunday – Insurrected State was fronted by Sergio, a man who frequently tested the boundaries of how much alcohol a person was capable of drinking. Oftentimes he would pass out cold in the middle of a set with the band still raging on behind his inert body. The sound of the band itself was a sort of marriage of the primal approach of bands like Crass and the Mexican hardcore of bands like Atoxxxico and Solucion Mortal. Once Sergio was out, the band recruited Art Muñoz to handle vocal duties, developed a stronger political bent to their lyrics, changed their name to No Church on Sunday and became much more charismatic and inspiring. The band recorded numerous demos. Following the band's breakup, guitarist Julio formed Golpe de Estado, which put out a couple of EPs. Art is married with kids, but still finds time to go to gigs regularly and has played bass in numerous bands, including Ollin, Bad Chile and Tumors. One of No Church on Sunday's numerous drummers moved up north and joined some really popular Gilman Street hardcore band. I have no idea what happened to Sergio.

Loli & the Chones – Originally called Los Firmazos, Loli & the Chones were initially heavily influenced by Billy Childish and the same '60s lo-fi rock bands that played such a prominent part in the sound of bands like Fingers. Unlike the Fingers, however, Loli & the Chones charged their sound with the aggression of bands like Black Flag, resulting in spurts of bile and venom that rarely lasted longer than their intros. Their sets were often intense affairs, one of the more notable occurring at a Hollywood club in the late '90s, where their bassist accidentally split his finger and tried to continue playing with blood flowing freely from the wound, down his bass and onto the stage. To date, Loli & the Chones have released two singles and two albums. They have as of late gone underground and it is not known whether they are still together.

The Looters – Comprised of 2/3 of the Dog's Breakfast and 2/3 of Butt Acne, the Looters dedicated themselves to the glorification of pointless violence, Manson and hallucinogenic substances. The "Flying Alvarado Brothers" (as once they were referred to in an issue of Ink Disease), Jimmy and John, supplied the guitars and vocals, respectively, while Shane and Jason White used their bass and drum talents to give the music the necessary propulsion. Although live performances were extremely rare, all were awash in blood and virulence, the three most memorable being the inaugural "Joe's Pit" gig (which ended after the windows were all kicked out), the Culver City Mason's Lodge fiasco (highlighted by John's arrest before the band hit the stage for trying to sneak beer in and a riot closing the show one band later), and what's been referred to over the years as "the New Year's gig" (where a certain mentally unstable fan broke a bottle, danced around waving the shards around, got socked in the face by a skinhead for his efforts and spent the rest of the night telling anyone who would listen that he saw Jesus in a lightning bolt. He was NOT on drugs, mind you). After approximately one year of wanton

mayhem, Jason quit and was replaced by Tony Quan, a graffiti artist, DJ and one hell of a drummer. Sadly, Shane's interest in the band waned and efforts to keep it going were for naught. The band called it a day in late 1986. As for their recorded output, the Looters appeared on the "Flex Your Mom" comp and were slated to appear on the aborted "Flex Your Burrito" comp as well. Numerous demos of varying quality and a soundboard recording of the Mason's Lodge gig were recorded, but most of them (including the soundboard) have been lost over the years.

Malignance/The Rise and Fall – Another hyper-speed hardcore band, Malignance hailed from the El Sereno area. Their initial demos consisted of short bursts of speed and power chords. Coupled with their singer's obsession with a girl that refused to date him, the band's songs were long on ill-natured humor and short on time. Following the name change to The Rise and Fall, their songs became longer, more metallic in sound and the lyrics became more serious. Not long after, they disappeared and the whereabouts of the members is not known.

Misled – Taking their musical cues from hardcore bands like Agnostic Front, Boyle Heights' Misled was like a well-placed kick to the face, being strangled by someone's beefy hand, or being run over repeatedly by a tank. They blazed their way through two explosive demos, numerous gigs and promptly broke up. George, their drummer, joined with the guitarist in an incarnation of the Thrusters and is now a member of Media Blitz.

Moral Decay – One of the area's formative hardcore bands. Though it is not known whether they would consider themselves an East LA band, they did in fact come from the area and had a profound influence on many of the bands that followed. Active in the very early '80s, Moral Decay played a tight, quick brand of hardcore that was popular at the time but is rarely heard these days. In addition to a few demos, Moral Decay was featured on the Smoke 7 Records "Sudden Death" compilation. Members of Moral Decay went on to join a variety of bands, including the Angry Samoans, Black Jax, Crankshaft, and UXA.

Our Band Sucks – El Monte's OBS forged a name for themselves in the late '80s and early '90s by showering stages across the county with popcorn, Silly String, shaving cream and beer. Their shows often resembled riots, although no one ever got hurt and no one was particularly angry about anything. They sounded like the bastard children of nerd punks like the Dickies and muscle-headed jock-core like Black Flag, and their preference of playing onstage in diapers, muu-muus, sun bonnets and Elvis costumes rankled more than a few clubgoers, who often showed their appreciation by throwing whatever was handy. For their efforts, OBS found themselves banned from quite a few clubs, most notably the Coconut Teaser, who forbade the band from ever playing there again following a show in which an overzealous fan covered the band, stage, monitor, microphone and PA tower alike with nearly a case worth of shaving cream. The band released one 12-inch EP on Nemesis Records, and three or four demos. There were also stories of an offer by a then-newly established Fat Records to release a full-length, but nothing apparently came of it. The band still occasionally reforms, fights and promptly breaks up every couple of years or so.

Peace Pill – After leaving Butt Acne, Scott Rodarte and his twin brother Randy recruited local fixtures Beatle and Jerry to take on vocal and guitar duties, respectively. Taking their name from an old hippie slang term for PCP, the band initially sounded like many of their hardcore contemporaries. Over time, their songs began leaning more towards Social Distortion-influenced rock-punk. Although their faster songs were played with less frequency, older songs like "Rude Boy Go Home" and "Reggae Lay" remained

in the set throughout the band's existence. Peace Pill recorded one demo. Following the dissolution of the band, Scott moved to Berkeley for a few years, Randy went on to drum for Fish Head before also moving to Berkeley and Jerry joined the roots-rock band The Glasspacks. When the twins moved back to East LA, Beatle joined them for a time in the band Ollin.

Rejected – The brainchild of L7/Superheroines roadie and San Bernardino expatriate Matt Wingrove, the Rejected provided contrast to the decidedly leftist hardcore scene around them by infusing their thrash beats with lyrics singing the glories of being a Young Republican and blowing up Iran, as well as singing the praises of Matt's favorite bands and generally giving the finger to whoever happened to be listening. The number of times they played live can be counted on one hand and they only managed to record one garage demo, but they left a lasting impression. After a couple of years in the 'hood, Matt moved back to San Bernardino. Singer Nancy "Manson" Mancias moved to Minneapolis in the early '90s and has not been heard from since. Guitarist Yogi Fuentes still plays his guitar and can be found drinking beer at Al's Bar in Downtown LA on any given weekend.

Riot in Progress/A.N.U.S./No Mind Asylum – Following the dissolution of the Dog's Breakfast, Shane White and Jim Vavrik took a stab at a more traditional hardcore punk sound, the result being Riot in Progress. They recruited Luis Zomorano (whose prior claim to fame was that he was allegedly one of the few people in the area who ever got to see the Germs perform live) to sing and a former member of local band Laughing Matter, Craig Tyron, to drum and began wreaking aural havoc at classmates' parties and Detox's infamous "shithouse." At one particularly memorable party, as the band played in the house's living room by candlelight, Luis took one of the candles, set a long piece of cloth tied to his arm on fire, and continued singing as the flame slowly crept up his arm. Not long after, Jim was booted out of the band, replaced by Bill Atheist, the name was changed to A.N.U.S. (short for "A New Underground Sound") and then to No Mind Asylum. More chaos and vandalism ensued at parties (including an incident in which someone spiked all the beverages in the house with coffee grounds, decorated the bathroom with shaving cream and toothpaste, put the homeowner's records in all the wrong covers and pissed into the blowdryer), appearances on the "Rock for the People of Highland Park" and "Flex Your Mom" compilations and then the band fell apart. Shane and Craig went on to form Hawaii's Hardcore and La Triste, Luis went into the roofing business and Bill supposedly went back to playing in the band the Atheists.

Side Effects/American Side Effects/Last Round Up – The pride of the 1980s Whittier scene. They sounded like a straight-edge hardcore band, but they actually drank so much that winos would hang their heads in shame. Their shows were like an M-80 going off in the middle of church: a sudden shock, a creeping sense of familiarity and an adrenaline rush that sent bodies gleefully careening off one another. After hearing that there was another band with the same name in England, they added "American" to their moniker, and then later changed the whole thing to Last Round Up. Although they never released a legitimate album, demos of varying quality exist. Numerous members went on to either join or establish other notable bands, including the Rigs, Christian Death and San Francisco's Oppressed Logic.

Stains – The finest purveyors of the punishing sound force that most of us in bands hoped we could come close to achieving. That they were label mates with the mighty

Black Flag was no mistake, as the Stains were one of the few bands who were easily capable of matching and, occasionally, transcending that band's sheer power and intensity. In an apocryphal quote usually attributed to Black Flag's bassist Chuck Dukowski, the reason that the Stains were signed to the band's SST label was because "they were better than us." Sadly, their long out-of-print 12-inch EP was their only release, but there has been at least one "European pressing" (read: bootleg) of it, and there have been rumors that it might be released again, along with an unreleased demo tacked on for good measure. Following the original dissolution of the band in the '80s, singer Rudy went on to front the band Corpse, second bassist Cesar (the first being the infamous Jesse Fixx) joined DC3 with Black Flag's Dez Cadena, guitarist Robert went on to do something else and their drummer Gilbert apparently "died," only to miraculously resurrect in the late 1990s and pen the text for the East LA section of the book *Fucked Up and Photocopied*. The Stains reformed many times in various incarnations throughout the '90s, the most recent lineup featuring Jody Hill and Mike Vallejo of Circle One and Rick of Tongue.

Thrusters – A great pop punk band, but more in the Adolescents-meet-TSOL-meet-Sex Pistols vein than the modern bastardization of the term. Bassist and chief songwriter "Mousie" had a enough of a knack for marrying a strong hook to sheer hardcore intensity that members of more straight hardcore bands like Copulation, C.O., Butt Acne and Mised were glad to fill vacated positions in the band's ranks and consider themselves part of the Thrusters legacy over the years. Being left-handed, Mousie would sit on the floor in front of his amp playing his bass upside down as someone held a loose mic in front of his face, completely unafraid of the imminent danger of his being trampled to death by errant dancers slamming no more than three feet away. As with so many other worthy bands in the area, the Thrusters have never released a record, but they are well documented by many great demos and are still sporadically active to this day.

Undertakers – Another often under-appreciated early East LA punk band, the Undertakers successfully bridged the rapidly widening chasm between new wave bands like Los Illegals and the punk of the Stains and Circle One. They were on many a bill at the Vex club and much was written about them, yet they never released anything on Tito Larriva's Fatima label like the Brat, nor were they ever signed to a major label, like Los Illegals. They did record an album, one that accurately illustrates their diversity and their accomplished sense of tough-edged pop, but, due to legal problems with a former manager, it remains unreleased almost 20 years after it was recorded, although one of its tracks, "Master Race," does appear on Grand Theft Audio's "All for One, One for All" compilation. Tracy Scull went on to Peace Corpse, Insulin Reaction, Knucklebone and was most recently in Tracy and the Skulls. After the breakup of the Undertakers, guitarist Tony Fingers formed Play Dead years later, changed the name to Media Blitz and, after numerous singles, compilation contributions and demos, continues to play under that banner to this day.

The Future Looks Bright Ahead

Many years have passed since most of the bands listed above have graced a stage, backyard, living room or garage, but their collective demise in no way equated to a death knell for East Los Angeles punk rock. As with the punk scene as a whole, much has changed in the neighborhoods, some good and some bad, yet the scene still continues to

thrive in backyards and one-off clubs across the area. Bands like Moral Decay, the Undertakers, Hey Taxi!, Black Jax, Strength in Numbers and Violent Children have since been replaced by Subsistencia, Teenage Rage, Union 13, Marble, Tezacrifico, Los Kung Fu Monkeys, Los Villains and a host of others just as brilliant, horrible, fast, slow, funny, angry and dedicated as their predecessors. A backyard party can still be found going on nearly every weekend, someone's always releasing their band's latest recorded work or a compilation, and fanzines, like *Sal Si Puedes* and *Real Boss Hoss*, still continually pop up with the same amount of unreliable regularity as those that came before them. And through it all, one can see the same optimism, the same unflagging loyalty, the same need to be heard in the new bands and scensters that fueled the generations that preceded them.

Which is not to say that all of the old-school punkers gave up on the whole thing, got married, had kids and bought SUVs. Surely, some of us did exactly that. Some of us also continue to play in punk bands. Some of us took our punk influences, coupled it with traditional rhythms and radical Chicano politics and created a new scene out of the old in bands with names like Ozomatli, Blues Experiment, Yeska, Aztlan Underground, Ollin, Quinto Soul, Quetzal, and Little Man and the Giants. Some of us became household names. Some of us are dead, either through our own stupidity or the unfortunate luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some of us still keep ourselves immersed in the scene by writing for fanzines or going to shows. Yet, no matter where we are and what we've done with ourselves we're all still here, still listening to what gets us off, be it grindcore, gamelan or Swedish disco, and still very proud of the little bit of canvas we painted on a larger punk rock tapestry.

Epilogue

We make it through five minutes of our set (roughly 12 songs for us) before someone rushes up and tells us to cut the noise because the cops are outside the gate. We make it halfway through the next song before the plug gets pulled on us.

I strain to look over the back fence and see that the street is rapidly filling up with police cars and the cops themselves are going into their trunks, pulling out their riot helmets and preparing themselves for a little rock 'n' rolling of their own. Over by the gate, the owner of the house is trying to calm the cop in charge, who seems to be completely disinterested in what the woman has to say. Things are going to get pretty ugly very soon.

We leave the stage, give the other band back their instruments and make our way back to where the heads have situated themselves around the keg. A heated discussion ensues about exactly who is taking the keg and where it will end up. Once that has been determined, we make our way to the gate as the cops begin lining up in formation and people in the backyard begin singing "Happy birthday to you/Happy birthday to you/Happy birthday dear PIG/Happy birthday to you" at the top of their lungs.

We all become part of the sea of people scrambling out of the backyard, pile into various cars and head for an alley off of City Terrace Drive, where we will finish off the keg, fight with each other, play cards, lament the fact that the Stains didn't play, listen to Johnny Boots as he tells of being kicked in the neck by a cop for holding a candy bar in a threatening manner as he left the party, and raise hell until the sun comes up as the strains of Agent Orange or Flux of Pink Indians blare through the beat up stereo perched on the hood of a nearby car. Next weekend, we'll be doing the same thing.