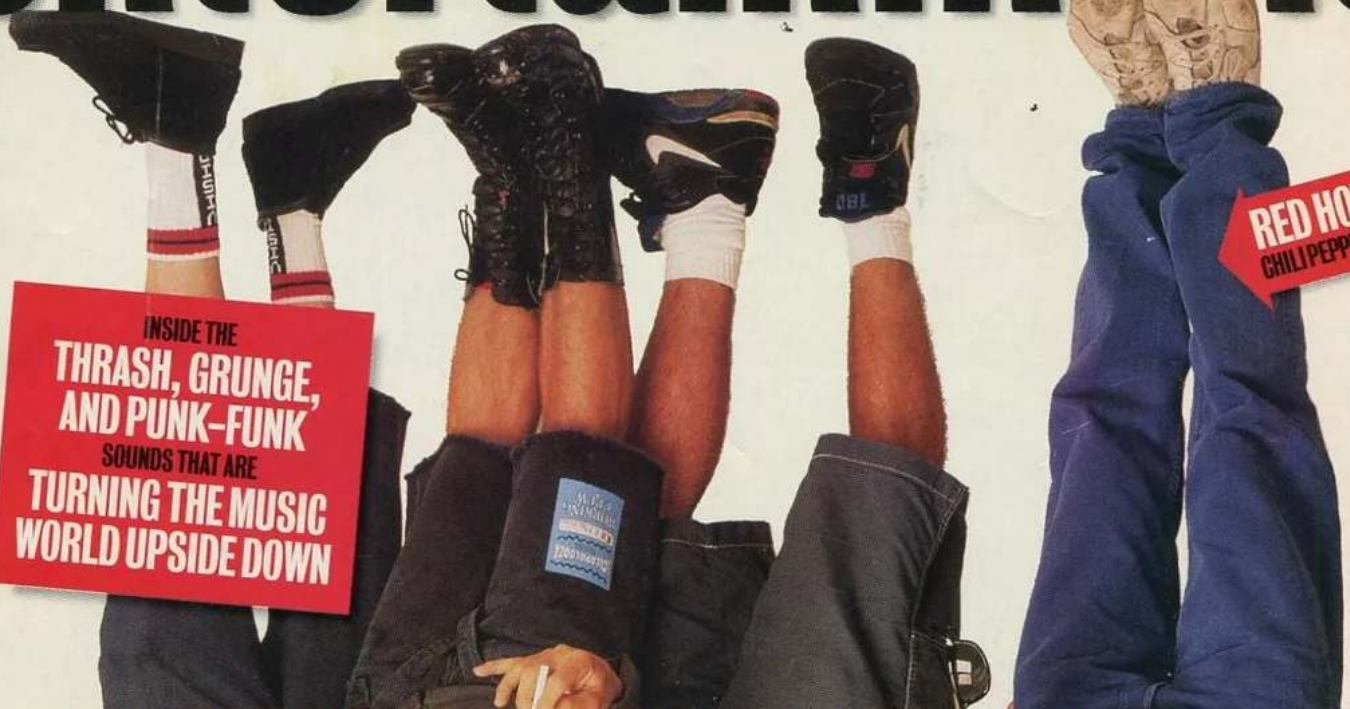


entertainment

WEEKLY

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INSIDE THE
**THRASH, GRUNGE,
AND PUNK-FUNK**
SOUNDS THAT ARE
**TURNING THE MUSIC
WORLD UPSIDE DOWN**

**RED HOT
CHILLIPEPPERS**

THE NEW ROCK

FEATURING 73 BANDS
INCLUDING: NIRVANA, PEARL JAM,
SOUNDGARDEN, LZ, THE CURE, P. M. DAWN,
FAITH NO MORE, MY BLOODY VALENTINE
54 ESSENTIAL ALBUMS

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WE HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE OF ROCK & ROLL

and its name is no longer Bruce Springsteen. The band on stage at New York's Ritz sounds like an ailing vacuum cleaner riding roughshod over a madrigal choir. Looking like zombies with T-shirts, they play intently, barely acknowledging the slam dancers before them. The fans don't mind the neglect; they're too busy defying gravity. When they aren't crashing into each other, one or more of them will scramble onto the stage and hurl their bodies back into the crowd (called the mosh-pit). Unruffled by the chaos, the band—My Bloody Valentine, from London—doesn't flinch. Nonchalantly the musicians step out of the stage-divers' way as waves of high-intensity drone and retina-piercing white lights wash over the crowd.

If this sounds as if we've been invaded by the planet Zon-Dar, then you're entitled to an explanation. On the one hand, there exists a fossilizing corpse called classic rock—a four-decade-old mummy grown stale and tired, a once vibrant part of mainstream culture now reduced to background music for car commercials and Olympic events. On the other hand, there is a new life form, pegged "alternative rock" by the in-

dustry and the media. It is a ridiculously vague term, referring to everything from R.E.M.'s sweet jangle pop to Soundgarden's lumbering metal to EMF's jagged dance tunes. But the rubric is useful if only to identify a new, abrasive, and refreshing scene that has slapped pop music upside the head.

Alternative rock has been fermenting for a decade on independent record labels, on college campuses, and in clubs in the U.S. and Britain. And now, to the delight and horror of anyone who loves it, the genre has found itself dragged—kicking and screaming, like some of its best music—into the mainstream. It is now big business, symbolized by more than just the jaw-dropping quadruple-platinum success of Nirvana's *Nevermind* album. In a scenario that cannot help but bring a smile to the face of anyone who came of age to R.E.M. or Hüsker Dü records, bands like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, and Temple of the Dog are leaving the likes of Wilson Phillips and ZZ Top in the *Billboard* dust. And record companies, confused but exploitive as ever, are scrambling to sign bands with long hair, sarcastic attitudes, thrift-shop clothing, and loud guitars.

Even Hollywood smells the potential of teen spirit. Imagine a major motion picture in which characters sport faded Mudhoney T-shirts, pull Replacements albums from their record collections, and go hear Alice in Chains, and you've scripted *Singles*, Cameron Crowe's look at love among the ruins in Seattle (due Sept. 18). Then there's the Lollapalooza '92 tour, a seven-band alternative-rock circus stuffed with the Chili Peppers, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam. With nearly all of its 36 shows sold out, Lollapalooza '92 is—like its '91 predecessor—one of the summer's leading concert draws.

"Basically, kids got disenchanted with what they were being force-fed on radio," says Chili Peppers singer Anthony Kiedis. "And they were looking for something more sincere to help them get through that stage in their lives when they're searching for meaning and rebelling against the Establishment. Something more heartfelt, than, say, Def Leppard."

Roll over, Beethoven, and tell Phil Collins the news.

NIRVANA WAS
JUST THE BEGINNING:

REDISCOVERING

ROCK'S REBEL ROOTS

WHAT EXACTLY IS alternative rock, beyond a name for styles that don't yet have Grammy categories? "It's an alternative to schlock like Elton John and Lionel Richie, I suppose," says guitarist Miki Berenyi of the British band Lush. The concept is

"hard to define," admits Bill Gould of Faith No More. "But our attitude toward it is you don't have to rely on certain rock tricks—like 20-minute guitar solos or teasing your hair and wearing makeup."

Gould is a bit disingenuous—the way alternative bands dress down is itself a shtick. Yet the music embraces an attitude not entirely new to rock but more widely accepted than ever by a generation raised on Watergate, MTV, and Reagan:

sardonic or downright oblique (especially in its lyrics), conscious of rock's clichés, wary of the notion that the music can free your soul. And, of course, it *sounds* different. While they owe a few allegiances to the past, the frenetic funk & roll moves of Fishbone, the claustrophobic industrial crunch of Ministry, and the caterwauling punk metal of L7 are new to rock. It is music a young generation can call its own—and if, like rap, it irks or confuses baby boomers, all the better.

The alternative-rock world of the '90s began taking shape a decade ago, hatched out of the remains of the '70s punk scene. By the '80s that world was a burnt-out memory, but its spirit lived in cities like Seattle and Minneapolis, on college radio stations, and in scruffy musicians who would snicker at the thought of attending music school. The new scene was less sexist—women could lead cranky, noisy bands just like the boys—and much more willing to break down genre barriers (as in punk-funk) than the rock of the '60s and '70s.

It was only a matter of time before the music business caught on—and it has, with a typical vengeance. Major labels have been luring bands away from their independent-label homes since the mid-'80s, encouraged by the slow but gradual success of R.E.M. Yet the record sales of that Athens, Ga., band and now of Nirvana have dramatically upped the ante. The New York alternative-metal combo Helmet found itself the object of a bidding war earlier this year and wound up with a contract worth over \$1 million with Interscope Records. Says Kat Bjelland of the Minneapolis screech & roll trio Babes in Toyland (who were snatched up by Reprise, a division of Warner Bros.): "I thought it was pretty wild that Warner signed us. I thought we were too strange-sounding for the general public. I told them, 'Uh, we're not going to do anything different than this, you know.' And they were like, 'Okay.'"

In signing on the dotted line, has alternative rock sold out? In many ways, yes. The music is entering a new, and potentially terminal, phase—caught between rejecting conventions of the rock establishment and being seduced by them. (An employee of the hotel in Palo Alto, Calif., where many Lollapalooza '92 bands were staying during the opening shows, complained of 5 a.m. room service requests for Jack Daniel's—now *there's* a rock tradition.) Alternative rock may soon be a shadow of its former self: Record stores are already stuffed with too many mediocre alternative records, and once the music industry realizes that not every band is the new Nirvana, the big-money contracts will recede as quickly as Michael Bolton's hairline. For now, though, alternative rock has succeeded at what seemed like a lost cause—pumping some life, and rebel spirit, back into rock & roll. For that alone, let the slam-dancing bodies continue to fly. (Additional reporting by Melissa Rawlins)

WHAT'S NOW?

SO, WHAT'S YOUR preference—mosh & roll, grunge, goth, or dream pop? Bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers may suddenly be giving Mariah Carey and Def Leppard a run for their money on the pop charts, but that doesn't mean so-called alternative rock is a new phenomenon. In fact, it has been around long enough, roughly a decade, to have developed its own founding fathers, subgenres, and offshoots, as well as its own fashion senses. Herein, a guide through the tangled, splintered world of '90s alternative rock—proof positive that "alternative" is truly a meaningless term for music that refuses to stand still.

DREAM POP

A LETHARGY OF THEIR OWN

What It Sounds Like: Alternative rock's version of New Age—but with a new-wave edge. Imagine layers of distorted electric guitars and drums washing over you, the lyrics mostly an unintelligible blur. Like those laser-light shows set to classic-rock tunes, dream pop is a zoning-out soundtrack for the disaffected twentysomething who wants to trip out but without the drugs. And judging from the style's popularity in Britain (where dream pop kicked off several years ago), plenty of those fans are out there. No

wonder another term for dream-poppers is *shoe gazers*. **Patron Saints:** Old-world guitar head-trippers like the Velvet Underground and the Byrds and spiritual forefathers like the Cure and the Jesus and Mary Chain. **Where to Start:** My Bloody Valentine, *Loveless*; Lush,

