

Arts & Entertainment

Poe, Melville, Hammett, Bradbury, Hernandez — 'Love and Rockets' competes with the classics

By Chris McCubbin
Staff Reporter

Since the pop art fad of the '60s even the serious critical types have been forced to admit that comic books occasionally manage to attain the level of art. Even the most high-brow elitist finds it difficult to deny the sophistication and energy in the drawings of artists like Will Eisner ("The Spirit"), Jack Kirby ("Fantastic Four"), or Bill Sienkiewicz ("New Mutants"). But comics are not just art portfolios, they also tell a story. Is it possible for a comic to be both art and literature?

It would be silly to say that "Love and Rockets" is fit to claim a place alongside Poe and Melville, but it's definitely a giant step up from the literary ghetto comics have inhabited for the last 50 years. Someday Los Brothers Hernandez will be remem-

bered as being as important to the development of comics as Ray Bradbury is to science fiction, or as Dashiell Hammett is to the hard-boiled detective story.

L&R, Book one is a reprint of the first two issues of the ongoing comic book "Love and Rockets." Los Brothers Hernandez are three brothers from California — Jaime, Gilbert and Mario.

The star of Book One is Jaime. His interrelated series, "Mechanics" and "Locas," take up a large slice of the book. The "Mechanics" stories are farcical, high-speed adventure stories celebrating science fiction movies, superheroes, pro wrestling, and similar icons of American cultures.

"Locas" on the other hand is a series that humorously, but realistically looks at the California punk and Hispanic cultures. Although the two series are dissimilar, both use the same charac-

ters in a tightly related continuity. The success of this technique can only be explained by Jaime's off beat genius.

Gilbert's main contributions to the books are "BEM," a long, surrealist parody of adventure comics, and "Radio Zero," a story which is simply a masterpiece.

"Radio Zero" is a nihilistic science fiction story set in a near-future totalitarian society where rioting and terrorism are the daily norm. What sets the story above the host of others that meet this description is its non-hero, Errata Stigmata. Errata is a disillusioned materialist who, from childhood, has periodically bled from the hands and feet in imitation of the wounds of



Art Courtesy of Fantagraphics

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likeable, believable, and most of the time, female. Particularly outstanding are Jaime's heroines Maggie and Hopey, two of the most charming characters in contemporary literature.

It seems wrong to call Maggie and Hopey 'heroines.' A heroine is someone who screams well, gets rescued and goes to bed with the hero at the end. Los Brothers female heroes are not adventure heroes in the hyper-competent tradition of say, Tarzan, or Batman, but they do manage to do a pretty good job of staying ahead in tough situations, and when they lose control of the situation it takes more than male intervention to get them out of it.

While completely avoiding preachiness and feminist cliches, Los Brothers have managed to produce the best feminist comic ever simply by showing women as strong, likeable, human, important characters.

L&R is a black and white comic. The simple lines and solid blacks that both Jaime and Gilbert favor should by all rights appear stark, but somehow the artists manage to summon a full spectrum of mood and emotion from their

work. Los Brothers produce art which is minimal without ever falling into minimalism.

Backgrounds are stylized, or hinted at, or eliminated altogether, the focus is always on the figures. Los Brothers are consummate masters of human expression. It would not be an exaggeration, I think, to say that never before has any artist managed to create such individual visual personalities, or as many natural human mannerisms, using as few lines as Los Brothers Hernandez.

If you consider yourself knowledgeable in late 20th century literature, read Love And Rockets. If you're interested in Mexican/Mexican American culture, read Love And Rockets. If your guilty pleasures include pro wrestling, sci-fi movies, or punk rock, read Love And Rockets. If you used to love comics, but you think you've outgrown them, read Love And Rockets. If you still love comics, but your idea of a great book is two giant robots bashing each other for 20 pages, what the heck, read Love And Rockets. If you like it, maybe there's still hope.



Art Courtesy of Fantagraphics

Christ. Errata's doll-like fragility is set against the urban nightmare of her society to create a contemporary metaphor that would stand out in any medium, even more so in a comic book.

Mario's work, "Somewhere in California," is a good story with fair art which, unfortunately, is completely overshadowed by the other two brother's prolific brilliance. It's easy to see why Mario felt he couldn't stay with "Love And Rockets." Hopefully he'll find some other outlet where his work can be appreciated on its own level.

Los Brother's protagonists are vulnerable without being neurotic, strong without being melodramatic, funny,

BoDeans latest is '60s influenced American pop

By Charles Lieurance
Senior Editor

BoDeans, "Love & Hope & Sex & Dreams" Slash

Time for another Byrds comparison. I know you're tired of hearing it. I know every new guitar band either sounds like the Byrds or the Stones circa "Exile on Main Street" these days, but bear with. It's all here: the ethereal layer upon layer of guitar, guitars with 6 strings, guitars with 12 strings, guitars with 116 strings, hypnotic, endless finger-picking exercises and vocals that mesmerize without boring. Happy and melodic pop with a slightly menacing edge that tells you you're going just a little too far into the stratosphere.

In this way the BoDeans are like REM and Lets Active, but their sound is clearer and their hooks stronger than either of these bands. The two vocalists, one who sings like he's got cotton balls stuffed in his cheeks (I kept trying to adjust the sound on the stereo to keep it from speeding like the Chipmunks) and another who sings like Michael Stipe after speech therapy, harmonize their way through an entirely accessible batch of '60s influenced American pop.

I wonder if the Byrds get together on Saturday afternoons and go through platter after platter of this stuff hoping to find a rip-off so blatant that they can call their lawyers.

"Listen to that, didn't we do that on 'Mr. Spaceman'?" says Jim McGuinn.

"No, that's from 'I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better'" says Chris Hillman.

David Crosby unloads his military issue .45 automatic into the stereo. Sure, the band is derivative, but everything seems derived from places so good and right, that it all works.

Thank God for Slash Records who've given us X, The Germs, Dream Syndicate and The Blasters. It's nice to know that all American bands don't sound like Bruce Springsteen.

Meat Puppets, "Out My Way" SST

The Puppets create the musical equivalent of Pointillism, managing to form whole intricate landscapes note by note. If the Pupps had two or three guitarists this would simply be a style, a genre. As it is, the meat Puppets have one guitarist, Curt Kirkwood, and the sound is a miracle. This album and last year's "Up on the Sun" could easily pass a music lover by on the first listen. It's one of those albums you might play once and sell to a friend.

The Pupps don't slug you over the eardrum with their sound, they slowly tease you into a web of just plain peculiar riffs and counter-riffs until you're theirs for life.

Taking all of the worst influences on earth — the self-indulgent guitar love of the Grateful Dead, the tunelessness of Neil Young, the monster chording of early heavy metal and acid rock, and even the Eagles (the opening of "Mountainline" is a rough replica of "Already Gone") — the Meat Puppets transcend

them with grace, wit and intelligence.

It's no wonder that Kirkwood, and the band, who often seems at a loss when faced with their manic guitarist's brilliant meanderings, close this LP with the raving screamer "Good Golly Miss Molly." This song hasn't sounded so demonic and uncontrolled since Little Richard cleaned his awesome pipes with it back in the '50s. It's like putting together one of those 5,000 piece jigsaw puzzles with lots of sky in it and then giving a primal scream and smashing the whole thing with demented glee. Kirkwood shoves Led Zeppelin, Neil Young, The Germs, Blue Cheer and Jerry Lee Lewis into a box of feral weasels and lets them battle it out. It's a good reason not to die.

The Puppets are doing their Drumstick carnage again this Thursday night. Kirkwood, who broke his finger in a van door a few months ago, had to cancel the last Lincoln show. Now he's fret-ready again. This should get you depressed types to the end of the week.

Eurythmics, "Revenge" RCA

Every so often a song comes along that seems to pull the spirit of rock 'n' roll into rack focus, combining what has been learned since 1954 with what has always worked, to create a single that vividly illustrates the timelessness of the music even for those whose view of time goes back only a decade or so.

A few years ago, the Pretender's "Middle of the Road" set the radio on fire with a riff at once archetypal and

unique. It had the vague impending evil of old country blues, a snarling defiant vocal reminiscent of everything from Howlin' Wolf and Big Mama Thornton to Nancy Sinatra and Patti Smith, and the "hellhounds and high water" adrenalin of vintage rock 'n' roll.

"Missionary Man," the opening cut on the new Eurythmics LP, is another case in point. Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart are an unlikely duo for setting the rock 'n' roll record straight. Their synth heavy orchestral art rock has, over the years, been technically perfect but yielded as much spirit as roadkill on a busy freeway.

On this track Lennox and Stewart sound so mature and gritty it's shocking. Where did this song come from? Obviously they've been hanging out with the right people. A more cynical soul might accuse them of having accepted an outtake from "Highway 61 Revisited" as a pay-off for Dave Stewart's help on Dylan's last album. The naive are simply left speechless.

"Missionary Man" manages to put a synthesizer in the same room with a guitar, a Little Walter impersonator on harmonica and a wailing gospel backup singer without the universe self-destructing. The riff echoes through the halls of rock and blues in search of a source. Of course, one can never pin this sort of thing down, it just is. It's got one of those lyrics that seems to have existed as a primitive chant to dark pagan gods:

*"There was a woman in the jungle
and a monkey on a tree
The missionary man he was followin' me
He said stop what you're doin'
get down upon your knees
I've got a message for you that
you'd better believe."*

This is the sort of sexual entendre you'd expect from a cagey old bluesman like Robert Johnson or Howlin' Wolf, but hardly from the pair that brought you "Sweet Dreams are Made of This."

Or from the pair that brings you the rest of this album.

Except for an acceptable piece of Blondie-esque pop called "Thorn in My Side," this LP is a complete dog.

Lyric sample: "If you open your heart/ you can make a new start/ when your crumbling world falls apart." Hey, Annie, could you get out the rhyming dictionary for me?

Unpardonable sin of the month: The use of the fine Solomon Burke bass line to "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love" to buoy up an empty ditty like "Take Your Pain Away."

The only thing keeping this band away from the same white soul junk heap Culture Club and Naked Eyes feel into is "Missionary Man." Personally, I'm with the cynics on this one.

As for the remainder, stick with Fine Young Cannibals and Everything But the Girl.