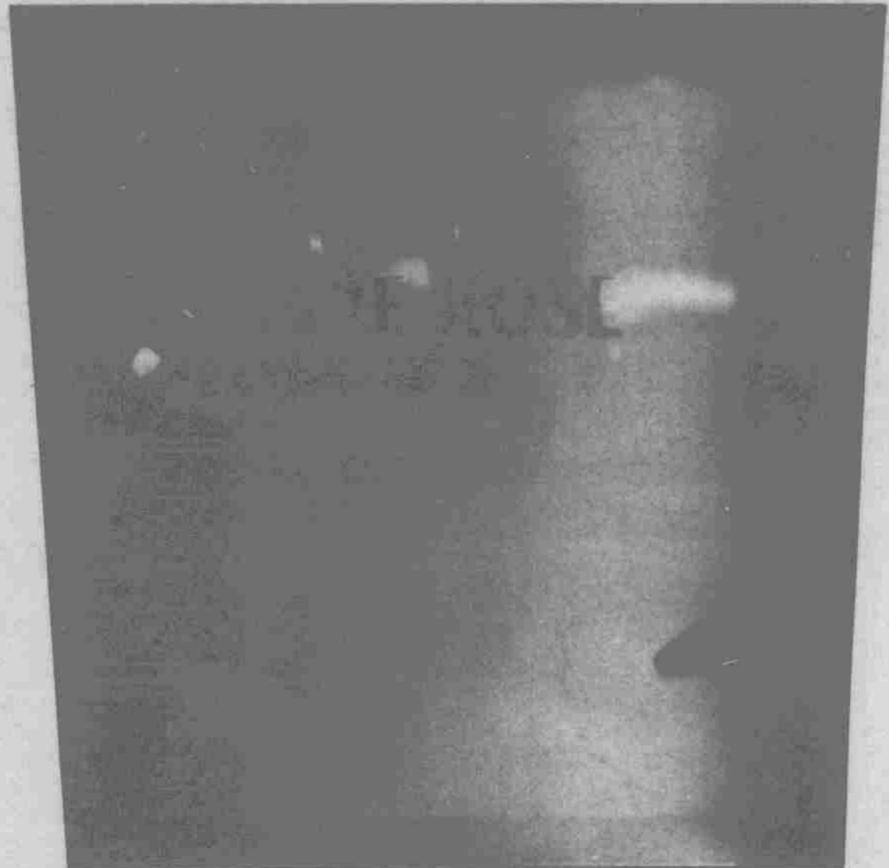


DIVER



Doug Carroll/Diversions

By Charles Lieurance

SIONS

I saw D. Boon and the Minutemen for the first time in the summer of 1981 at some small dive in L.A. The joint was spinning, partly because I'd been alternating beer and speed most of the evening and partly because the skinheads on the dance floor were going in restless circles, hunched over and wild-looking, like a pack of wolves surrounding a camper with one bullet left in his gun. The skinheads' shadows moving along the wall made the walls appear to move. Like I say, I'd been drinking.

The only song I'd heard by the Minutemen was "Like a Gringo" off of a Radio Tokyo compilation. It was the closest thing to what I then considered "music" I heard the whole night. There seemed to be structures to the music, but the structures were so abbreviated that by the time one could feel a groove, it was gone.

Up front at the microphone was the biggest face I'd ever seen. The face was connected to one of those huge canvas gym balls you used to kick into the air with your feet in grade school. The ball had legs and arms that twitched and flailed as if the creature had springs for bones. The face yelped and shrieked a few slogans that sat atop the noisy riffs and grooves like an oil fire on the ocean.

Something about the Holocaust and America sucking.

The next morning, the closest I could come to remembering what had happened the night before was that I'd been swallowed by the mouth on the cover of King Crimson's "In the court of the Crimson King."

In the years between 1982 and 1985, I saw the Minutemen seven times. Their blend of funk, country, jazz and hardcore was never easy to take, but once you get used to the brevity and the Minutemen's complete indifference to how songs are traditionally constructed, the music was full of passion and

the rewards for following their brief trains of thought were manifold.

The last time I talked to D. Boon was in Boulder, Colorado at the Blue Note in 1984. The bar was huge and a lot nicer than the dive in L.A. The skinheads were circling on the dance floor. I was trying to figure out where these kids hid from Boulder's annoying population of rich ex-hippies and Buddhist yuppies during the day. There weren't enough skinheads to make the room spin. The music had matured, become as complicated and full of ideas as the best jazz but without any of the sanctified subtlety of performance that can make watching jazz a bore.

It was freezing outside, but Boon, wearing a flimsy, plaid shirt, came off the stage covered in sweat. I asked him, stupidly, if he thought that punk music was keeping some of these kids from ever growing up, keeping them filled with adolescent angst just a little too long.

Boon said the audience was going to grow up as fast as the band grew up. He said anyone who could follow the Minutemen's music was grown up enough for him.

True enough. A few years later Boon died on an Arizona highway. The first thing I thought of when I heard was a Meat Puppets song the Minutemen covered called "Lost," about being lost on the freeway, lost in every way a person can be lost.

But since we don't know where people go when they die and how happy or sad that place is, the only one who was really lost, in every way a person can be lost, on that highway was the Minutemen's bass player, Mike Watt.

For another year and a half, Mike Watt was lost. Last year he was found by Ed Crawford or Ed from Ohio, a classically trained trumpet player, Minutemen devotee and probational

student at Ohio State. Crawford tracked down Watt on the basis of a false rumor that he and the minutemen's drummer George Hurley were actively seeking a guitar player for a new band. Crawford had been playing guitar for only about six months but he was possessed with the idea of being in a band with his heroes. He left Ohio for California on a little less than a wing and a prayer, found Mike Watt and saved him. Saved him in the most innocent way one human being can save another, completely without knowledge that any saving was needed.

Crawford, Watt and Hurley began playing together as FIREHOSE in the late winter of 1986, touring with Sonic Youth, probably the only other band in the nation with the Minutemen's unrelenting power of musical expression.

"I first had to learn how to play with people I didn't grow up with." Watt is sounding a bit frayed on the edges over the phone. His voice, four years ago, sounded light and shy; now it's deeper and less immediately able to communicate words. "I leaned on D. Boon very heavy. Now I'm independent enough to appreciate other people . . ."

It's the name D. Boon that his voice catches on. Whenever I ask any questions that involve the Minutemen, he says "D. Boon was . . ." or "D. Boon was a great . . ." and trails off. He doesn't have any answers for questions like that, so I stop asking them.

"I admired the spirit of Edward, coming to California with nothing . . ." His voice picks up a little now we're out of the graveyard. "getting Edward started was true to the spirit of the Minutemen, to give a kid a chance. I saw a chance to put our ideas into practice with Edward."

And FIREHOSE is miles from the graveyard and more miles from the highway where Watt

was lost. On March 27, FIREHOSE will be in the Haymarket Square, 813 'Q' Street, with fellow SST artists DC-3 and Crimony. FIREHOSE is a blast of energy more sustained and more mature than anything the Minutemen did. The Minutemen were less conventional, the Minutemen were less likely to be played on the radio, and the Minutemen were more on the edge. But FIREHOSE as a band for all the bands in the world to reckon with. With Watt's free-form bass style taking the role of lead instrument, leaping through Crawford's stuttering rhythm-guitar bursts, FIREHOSE has little to do with hardcore or punk. It transcends haircuts with a leap of flame. The first cut from the album on SST, "Ragin' Full On," is a political anthem like nothing the Minutemen produced. "Brave Captain" sparks a funky, jagged style that charges through the whole first side.

Side two is more introspective, consisting mostly of ballads. Raging ballads, but ballads nonetheless. Some of them are elegies. "Candle and the Flame" is a gorgeous sad song that the Minutemen could never have pulled off in the midst of their experimental didacticism. And it would have been a shame had it never been recorded.

"I'm amazed the way the album has gone, it's popularity, you know." Watt really can't believe it. I know an honest voice when I hear it.

"I mean, George and I were just bass and drum, the janitors of rock 'n' roll."

"I suppose it counts for something that we're not in the rock 'n' roll flavor-of-the-week club."

Must count for something.

What would D. Boon say?

"He'd say 'cheer up, f---er.'"

The FIREHOSE show starts at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$5 in advance, \$6 at the door.