

Henry Rollins to appear at Duffy's Sunday

By Charles Lieurance
Senior Editor

In 1983, just after the release of "Everything Went Black," Black Flag was to play a large Quonset hut in Denver. The Rocky Mountain chapter of American skinheads had assembled en masse and were waiting for Henry Rollins and company to recreate live one of the greatest rock'n'roll albums of all time, "Damaged."

As it turned out, the police broke up what was apparently a spontaneous concert during the first few notes of the sound check and Black Flag loaded their gear up and, with a trail of cars and vans behind them, set out to find a new place to play. After driving around half the night, the band found a dark, sinister hole in which to unleash the classics of "Damaged,"

"T.V. Party" and "Rise Above." Washington D.C.'s Henry Rollins will appear Sunday at Duffy's Tavern for an all-ages show. He's come a long way since those first SST shows, since leading a pack of dissipated teenagers around a multitude of faceless cities in search of a venue the police don't know about.

As one of the first people to realize the power and potential of loud, fast rules, he was also one of the first people to realize the genre's inherent limitations and jump the hardcore boat before he became walking self-parody like Fear's Lee Ving and the Circle Jerks' Keith Morris, affecting pubescent angst and anger with slimy Vegas schmaltz.

While the other perpetrators of the L.A. hardcore revolution spun out fossilized three-chord riffs and shockingly lifeless Stooges homages,

Rollins moved on to more fertile ground. Although he'd spent most of his life proving he was a vulgar pissed-off idiot, Rollins made a bid for the dubious title of punk's poet laureate, replacing the hibernating, domesticated Patti Smith.

He appeared on MTV's "Cutting Edge" reciting hipster Bukowski-esque Beat noodlings. He was seen hanging around Bill Burroughs. He and John Giorno had lunch. Suddenly, there were more pocket volumes of Rollins' verse than Black Flag albums. Instead of demanding a case of Heineken in his concert riders, Rollins began demanding bean curd and mineral water. My God, the man who penned the lines, "We've got nothing better to do than watch T.V. and have a coupla brews . . . we don't wanna talk about anything else/we

don't wanna know/ we're just dedicated to our favorite shows . . . Gilligan's Island! Saturday Night Live!" was becoming a regular hippie.

Rollins' solo albums even had tinges of the Grateful Dead ("where have all the skinheads gone? long time passing. . .") spread liberally throughout the grooves in the form of long, slow guitar meanderings. And all those Black Sabbath licks Rollins spent his youth sabotaging with intelligence and humor began to appear in straighter, less ironic, forms. There's still enough anger in Rollins to "Rise Above," and because he isn't tired in one overwrought format, the anger rarely seems put on. It's never been particularly easy to listen to Rollins in any format though. In Black Flag, Rollins' vocals were shrouded in a

toilet bowl mix that bordered on the unlistenable more often than not. His solo outings, for all the advantages of adequate production, are no less troublesome. Rollins, like most of the greats in punk rock, is more of a presence than a talent and his recent attempts at sophistication succeed more because someone as hulking and menacing as Rollins would seem to defy sophistication in favor of getting schooled in driving the big rigs cross country from some T.V. commercial tech school.

Rollins is a legend, and unlike his peers, he still warrants veneration. So what if Rollins can't sing or play an instrument very well. My God, the man wrote "T.V. Party." I'd still follow him around the city half the night.

The cover charge has not yet been announced.

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