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## The 'alternative' now is quantity, not quality

By Mark Lage  
Staff Reviewer

They're letting way too many people make records these days.

If, as a record buyer, you're looking for an intimidating sight, go to the downtown Pickle's store and stand in front of the Imports/Independents section. It's gigantic. It has more than quadrupled in size since I've been in college, without any notable increase in output of good records.

At least I have never met or read about anybody (who I trusted) who has thought so, but with that much material, who can really tell?

Even if there were a hundred really good records in all the releases by all the unheard-of bands, it would take you years to find them. And if it can be assumed that the records that fight their way out of that pile into college radio top ten lists and onto MTV's "120 Minutes" are somewhere near the top in quality, then I guarantee that there are not a hundred good records to be found in there. There may not even be one.

This is not intended to slight Pickle's in any way -- they don't make them, and their attempt to maintain a separate Independents section while most other record stores have given up on it is probably admirable.

contract. Local bias probably can't be avoided, but saying that a band like 13 Nightmares is better than just about anything you'll hear on 120 Minutes seems to me like a statement of the obvious.

For many knowledgeable people, the term "alternative" has become a four letter word.

Tune into 120 Minutes one Sunday night, and two things will happen. 1.) You'll see example after example of the kind of problems I'm talking about. 2.) You'll get a nice start on a good night's sleep to begin your week.

You'll see the Stranglers doing a Kinks cover, The Swans doing Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart," and some band whose name I can't remember doing a really slow, mumbled version of The Velvet Underground's "Sweet Jane." You'll see aging cult stars Julian Cope and Iggy Pop jumping around looking and sounding really ugly. And you'll see a number of five-year old videos by bands like R.E.M. and Black Flag. Let's hear it for new music.

When you do get around to hearing a new song by a relatively new band like the BoDeans or Lilac Time, for example, you'll want to suggest that they'd be more successful writing and performing their songs while awake. That is, providing you can stay that way until the end of their performance.

In the '60s, The Beatles saved rock 'n' roll by putting out a series of albums that simply demonstrated its potential. The problem became that although the Beatles and some of their contemporaries were great, Beatlemania was not, and by the mid-'70s, ambitious studio albums like "Sgt. Pepper's," "The Beatles," and "Abbey Road" had inspired racks and racks full of art rock-schlock records.

But soon bands like The Sex Pistols and The Clash came to the rescue, demonstrating that the knowledge of a couple chords and a healthy dose of energy were all you needed to make better albums than anything Jethro Tull or Uriah Heep could ever muster.

Serious listeners abandoned much of the mainstream and began following the less popular but worthier movement which would become known as "alternative," and from which great bands like R.E.M., The Replacements, The Minutemen, The Violent Femmes, Husker Du, and Joy Division would emerge.

But now, a decade or so after the advent of The Sex Pistols, this too has degenerated, into hordes of listless minimalists of varying styles -- from exhausted hardcore to boring three-chord guitar pop, all the way down to low-level computer programming.

So now we have two different sets of racks full of bad albums.



Connie Sheehan / Daily Nebraskan

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**'... "alternative" has become a four letter word.'**

It just seems that every last subdivision of alternative music -- hardcore, industrial music, synth-dance/power thud, and so on -- has its own bevy of little record companies, enabling just about anyone who lives in a large city and can sustain audible sound for longer than a half an hour can put out an album.

This seems to be the only lasting impact of what was once a promising movement. All of the best underground bands from earlier in this decade have either broken-up, fizzled out, or moved into the big-time while leaving their best albums behind them.

They have also left behind an ever-multiplying number of bands who say "interesting" things in interviews, take neat pictures, but are musically impotent to put out anything that sounds good, interesting, innovative, or can even keep you awake.

Any good new band must face the unenviable task of somehow forcing their record through the literally thousands of others being released. If they happen to be from somewhere like, say, Lincoln, Neb., it's difficult to even get a