

**RECORD
-REVIEW-
WITH...
MARK LAGE**



Jeff Reiner/ Daily Nebraskan

By Mark Lage
Staff Reviewer

**Sonic Youth
Daydream Nation
Blast First/Enigma Records**



Courtesy Enigma Records

Since I'd known for several weeks that the new Replacements album was due out Jan. 30, I had been planning to review that album this week. But when I went in last week to pick it up, out of curiosity I also bought a tape of the latest Sonic Youth album, "Daydream Nation," and immediately popped it into my Walkman. Unfortunately for the Replacements (I imagine they'll get over it), it hasn't found its way back out, except to be flipped over and played again.

From the opening seconds of the first song on the double-length album, Sonic Youth leaves no doubt about the nature of the band to listener relationship--they are in charge. This album captivates immediately, sustains it throughout most of its length, and gets better with each repeat.

I had heard parts of various previous Sonic Youth records before, but had never owned one. This is primarily because the only thing you can learn about Sonic Youth by hearing them at a party or in a record store is that they make terrible background music. If your attention is divided between it and anything else, their raw, noisy and discordant music will simply grate on your nerves.

But once you sit down and give it your full attention, the method and power of the music becomes unavoidable. And throughout their career they have incorporated more and more hooks and structure into their songs.

The result is an album like "Daydream Nation," which employs about as wide a range of guitar sounds, techniques and emotions as you could hope to find. There are lots of bands who can make experimental noise, lots who are good with power chords, and lots who can write catchy guitar parts. But there are few who can incorporate it all into one thing without losing control.

The range of emotions evoked by the music on "Daydream Nation" tends toward the dark side. It is usually mean, angry, frightening, or occasionally sad. About the brightest it ever gets is the wistful sound of the first song "Teenage Riot."

However, unlike so much of alternative drone music, this is very active, engaging darkness. Their music hypnotizes not by simply repeating a part over and over again until you fall asleep. They begin something, change it a little bit, build it up, and then rip it to shreds. And then they do it again. Just at the parts where things seem to be calming down a little bit, they'll toss off a barrage of thunderous power chords, topped off with some raw guitar scraping.

The best example of this is "Candle," the cleanest sounding

song on the album. This song's hauntingly catchy bridge-verse-chorus structure is interrupted in the middle by a furious guitar anxiety attack.

Often, on songs like "Silver Rocket," and "Total Trash," the main structures will just dissolve into periods of formless experimental noise, from which the main hook will gradually re-emerge and take over, strategically made more powerful simply by this type of structuring.

They do get a little get carried away at times, though. The endings of "The Sprawl," and "Cross the Breeze," for example, are a little too drawn-out and directionless to hold my attention. And some of the music gets really grating even if you're paying close attention, especially "Eric's Trip," and "Rain King." But these moments are isolated, and greatly outnumbered by great ones.

Sonic Youth is one of the most aptly named bands around. Sonic is the best word to describe the forward momentum generated by the raw fuzz of the rhythm guitars, and the attitudes and simplicity of the lyrics are definitely Youth.

The lead vocals, alternated between bassist Kim Gordon and guitarist Thurston Moore, are mostly yelling rather than singing, especially Gordon's. But after years of doing it, they have become effective with their styles.

The lyrics consist of simple phrases dealing with boredom, drugs, frustration, New York City (Sonic Youth's hometown) and stardom, and are aided a great deal by the power of the music. For example, you can only buy into the somewhat trite candle metaphor in "Candle" because the music is so effectively haunting.

It's been a while since I bought a new album which I both liked immediately, and kept liking over a period of repeated listenings. And while there are a handful of bands who have managed to survive through the past few years, and whose new albums can be enjoyed as long as they're not too closely to their older ones, Sonic Youth is one underground band which continues to thrive.

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