

Musical acronyms spell out 1991



By Paul Winner
Staff Reporter

If nothing else, 1991 was the year of musical acronyms. N.W.A., R.E.M., PE, G'NR, EMF, C+C and of course, O.P.P. What that says about the year in music is anybody's guess — maybe things were hidden behind a lot of other things.

In a year in which acts (as opposed to bands) secured most of the big hits, there were many pleasant surprises for fans who don't confine their music purchases to the Billboard charts.

Who would have thought that the biggest tour of the year would be a post-modern traveling sideshow featuring nothing but alternative bands? Or that N.W.A. and R.E.M. would both knock Paula Abdul off the No. 1 spot? That Seattle rock would finally catch the attention of the entire nation? That Garth Brooks would do whatever it was that he did to debut a country album at No. 1?

1991 was in all ways a fairly strange trip. It started out with a war in the Mideast and ended with the release of hostages from the same place, which just goes to show that there was always something good after all the crap was gone. Check it out for yourself:

Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker and the Byrds all made it into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. It was about time. The Rolling Stones released the only anti-war single of the year, "Highwire," securing their rocky position as aging rebels, and Rock in Rio II was held in Brazil. George Michael bombed, but A-ha packed the joint. Go figure.

Last spring, R.E.M. released a

baroque album, decided not to tour, but "Out Of Time" went through the roof anyway. Boston's favorite sons Extreme scored a left-field smash with the ballad "More Than Words." The film "The Doors," with the help of Val Kilmer's dead-on caricature, spawned another wave of Morrison-mania.

By early fall, the New Jersey combo Naughty By Nature released a great rap album, though some people took a while to figure out what O.P.P. stands for. The first all-rap "MTV Unplugged" was broadcast. L.L. Cool J. became a smash once again. The film "Madonna: Truth Or Dare" was released and told the nation a bunch of things which we figured we already knew anyway.

SOUNDS

N.W.A.'s blistering "Niggaz4Life" debuted at No. 1 to the shock of a nation. Many people bought it, but few really admitted it. Michael Bolton became the next big comeback story. "Faux-blues" was added to Random House's standard dictionary. Vanilla Ice released a live album, didn't he?

Good news: James Brown was released from prison on parole and mounted his 37th comeback show. Bad news: He still has the same hairdo.

"Slave to the Grind" and "For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge" by Skid Row and Van Halen, respectively, brought arena rock and metal back to the top of the charts. Natalie Cole's collection of big-band standards went to No. 1, bringing a pedestrian appreciation of Nat King Cole's music to suburbs everywhere.

EMF scored a big hit with "Unbelievable." The press dubbed the group Britain's New Kids on the Block. No way — New Kids are much cuter. Throughout most of the summer, Jane's Addiction brought alternative rock to a mighty peak with its Lollapalooza tour and then announced its break-up. At least the nation discovered the Butthole Surfers and Henry Rollins.

Underground messiahs Jesus Jones scored a well-deserved No. 1 with the uplifting "Right Here, Right Now." New Kid Donnie Wahlberg was arrested for allegedly setting fire to a hotel room's carpet, and blockheads everywhere scrounged up enough money for bail. Sharing a cell with him was Rick James who just did some super-freaky stuff that allegedly was illegal.

The movie "The Commitments" and its soundtrack were released to a grateful public this fall. Wilson Pickett was re-introduced to the masses, and Guns 'N Roses finally got off their duffs and released two very, very long albums. Guitarist Izzy Stradlin decided to quit.

Jazz giant Miles Davis passed away and remained the coolest jazzman on this or any other planet. British soul popster Seal released the dreamy single "Crazy" and stood to become the next Terence Trent D'Arby. Let's hope not. Prince unveiled a new band, a new look, a new album and his rear end at the MTV awards show.

Bryan Adams' "Everything I Do (I Do It For You)" became the biggest-selling single of all time, and the nation pined for "We Are The World." Public Enemy released another blistering disc with "Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black," complete with a very cool collaboration with Anthrax on "Bring tha Noize."

Michael Jackson gave us the follow-up to "Bad" with "Dangerous." In the 11-minute "Black Or White" video, the man with the everchanging face hollered and grabbed at his pants a lot. It was extremely controversial. Not. Neil Young got all of the feedback out of his system on "Weld" and "Arc," the three-disc feedback frenzy, then headed to the studio to record the long overdue follow-up to "Harvest." Here's to 1992.

Any questions?



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Among the 1991's best: (Clockwise from top right) Pixies "Trompe Le Monde," De La Soul's "De La Soul Is Dead," A Tribe Called Quest's "The Low End Theory" and Robbie Robertson's "Storyville."

The year in 10

1. "Storyville," Robbie Robertson
Utter brilliance without the pretensions.
 2. "Ten," Pearl Jam
Seattle's other great new rock band.
 3. "Nevermind," Nirvana
Top 40 never sounded so cool.
 4. "Everclear," American Music Club
College rock for the hopelessly lovetorn.
 5. "Achtung Baby," U2
Enough to reaffirm faith in Dublin's heroes.
 6. "De La Soul Is Dead," De La Soul
Innovative and playful.
 7. "Peggy Suicide," Julian Cope
Acid-rock in technicolor.
 8. "Trompe Le Monde," Pixies
Made "Jeffrey with one f" a household phrase.
 9. "The Early Years," Tom Waits
A necessary excavation.
 10. "On Every Street," Dire Straits
Even without Sting, Mark Knopfler's a genius.
- Most disappointing album of the year:
"Blood Sugar Sex Magik," Chili Peppers — cut out a half hour, you got a great LP
■ Paul Winner
1. "Nevermind," Nirvana
Pop songs molested by power chords.
 2. "Luck of the Draw," Bonnie Raitt
A touching narrative from the slide guitar queen.
 3. "Sailing the Seas of Cheese," Primus
The summer's hottest funk was enough to melt your Velveeta.
 4. "The Low End Theory," A Tribe Called Quest
Better than Urban Dance Squad, the Tribe had cool rap down to science in '91.
 5. "Why Do Birds Sing?," Violent Femmes
The Femmes still haven't lost their knack for bizarre pop hooks.
 6. "Metallica," Metallica
The best accidental hit of the year.
 7. "Gish," Smashing Pumpkins
Psychodelia reinvented.
 8. "Follow for Now," Follow for Now
The fiercest rap-metal fusion since 24-7 Spyz.
 9. "The Sky is Crying," Stevie Ray Vaughan
Superb studio outtakes from the late great.
 10. "Doo Dad," Webb Wilder
A southern-fried guitar attack from Nashville's resident weirdo.
■ John Payne

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