

# Reviews

## British industrial funk by curt Wolfgang Press lacks inspiration, spirit

By Keith Spera

REVIEWER

Austin's Liberty Lunch is one of those places that was made to host a rock 'n' roll show.

A sheet-metal skin, tattooed with bizarre Impressionistic murals, is tacked to a steel girder frame. The cavernous shell of a building encloses a space that can hold up to a thousand people on its cement floor, the hippie security guard who couldn't recall if he'd been working there four or six years says.

A handful of wooden picnic tables and a few metal chairs with worn vinyl cushions were scattered about the interior.

Beer, at \$2 a bottle, is the drink of choice.

Given this atmosphere, where a lively, sweaty show by the likes of The Reivers or The Smithereens would be right at home, the English industrial funk band Wolfgang Press seemed a tad out of place when they appeared there earlier this month.

For those unfamiliar with Wolfgang Press and its style of music, a brief introduction is provided here.

Wolfgang Press is one of a number of bands in the "industrial music" genre, which uses a repetitive beat wrapped with an array of usually haunting synthesizer sounds and often harsh, abrasive feedback-laden guitar.

This style is never fused with bass-driven funk by Wolfgang Press, resulting in an a sound that is most safely described as unusual.

Wolfgang Press reached this milestone in sound by way of a couple of name and personnel changes.

Earlier versions included Rema Rema, whose 1980 EP contained the aptly-titled "The Feedback Song," and Mass, whose music can be described only as "death rock," with its dark, somber funeral dirge sound.

The first release under the name Wolfgang Press came in 1983, when an EP was released in England on 4AD Records.

4AD is not your typical music label. It specializes in industrial music (besides Wolfgang Press, they carry groups such as Xymox and the Cocteau Twins), and is selective about the bands it signs.

4AD downplays the identity of the performers in its bands (it's tough to find pictures or even the names of band members anywhere on their records' jackets).

Tim Davis, music director at KANM, Texas A&M's student-run radio station, describes 4AD as "an exclusive, elitist, independent record label."

He went on to say that 4AD releases have "a consistent overall sound," and for that reason, people will buy a band's records even without having heard them, just because they are on 4AD.

Until this year, Wolfgang Press's records were available in the United States only as imports.

In 1989, two of their records, the EP *Kansas* and the LP *Bird Wood Cage*, have been released jointly in the U.S. by 4AD and Rough Trade Records.

On the heels of these releases, Wolfgang Press has come stateside for a bit of a tour, which brought them to Liberty Lunch on March 10.

After a so-so set of basic progressive rock by opening act The Last Straw, with some bluesy guitar leads tossed in by an Eric Johnson-clone guest guitarist, the crowd of about 120 gathered at the edge of the stage to await the appearance of Wolfgang Press.

At about midnight, they came onstage and proceeded to play some songs.

Sort of.

While a vocalist was there doing the singing, and a guitarist fiddled with a guitar, and a keyboardist hit some buttons, Mr. Technology, in

the form of prerecorded tapes, supplied the funky bass and pulsing drum foundation on which most of the songs were based.

If you're going to do a concert, it seems only appropriate that you'd bring along actual persons to play the instruments.

If not, then there's really not much point in playing "live" — it's the same as a club playing the music on its sound system.

Keyboardist Andrew Gray said after the show, "We just haven't found the right people to play with."

"We don't want to just hire somebody to come out on tour with us."

In five years, you guys haven't found someone to play with? I feel sorry for you, I really do.

For the first portion of the show, the crowd, who were more than likely Wolfgang Press fans if they paid \$7 to see them, seemed, well, kind of bored.

Maybe everyone was busy looking for the bassist and drummer. Maybe it was because the musicians who were on stage were acting like they were playing for an empty hall (which they almost were).

Dull, irritating, and emotionless are all words that come to mind.

Things picked up a bit when the band launched into its cover of Aretha Franklin's "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" (reason for doing the song — "it's a good tune, ya know?" said Gray).

Vocalist Mark Cox, in a black wool 3-piece suit and t-shirt, started to get into it a bit, hunching over and pointing his head of short, spiky dreadlocks at the crowd as he spat out the lyrics to the next song, "Kansas," which takes a cynical look at the JFK assassination.

Closing out the brief 70-minute set (were the bassist and drummer tired?) was an encore performance of "Cut the Tree," an anti-bigotry tune that appeared on the 4AD compilation album *Lonely Is An Eyesore*, and whose video popped up on MTV's 120 Minutes show last year.

The band left the stage, and then came back out a few minutes later and started packing up their equipment with the same curt efficiency they displayed while performing.

Throughout the show, the band seemed completely disinterested in what they were doing.

Gray chomped on a wad of gum as he bustled about his keyboards and synthesizers in a businesslike manner.

Guitarist Mark Allen spent most of the show staring at the effects pedals at his feet, which he used to make his gorgeous cherry-red hollow-body Gibson guitar spew forth a host of distortion and sounds.

His expression never changed — he always appeared to be profoundly unhappy. His shaved head, baggy tan shorts, clunky black shoes, and pale, thin physique didn't help cheer anybody up.

Granted, this music isn't all that happy. And maybe the band was not looking chipper because they knew they'd have to pack and load all their equipment after the show.

Of his emotionless expression, Gray said he looks like he feels, and he doesn't just put on fake expressions.

But a concert, at least in my opinion, should offer something more than recordings.

It should be an interacting of some sort between performer and audience (with the performer at least acknowledging the audience's presence). Emotions should be expressed.

The musicians should be showcasing their skill (or lack thereof) by at least attempting to perform their parts live, and not relying on tapes.

I have no quarrel with their music per se; that is not the focus of this review. I do, however, think that a concert by Wolfgang Press — at least the one I saw — is a waste of time.

## 'Immodest' proposal to divide Texas treads on delicate political territory

By Kelley Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

You won't like it. Texas historian Donald W. Whisenhunt, author of "The Five States of Texas," warns that his book may alienate its readers. His "immodest proposal" encourages the separation of Texas into 5 separate states, an idea close to blasphemy for the diehard Texan.

"Within the next few pages, I will probably lose a number of readers, especially Texans who will be seriously offended by my proposal," he writes in the preface. In particular, he fears he will lose the proud Texans who live and die by the word "Texas" and do so mostly because of the state's size and heritage.

He is not worried about losing those who have to deal with the logistics of a state that's about the same size as France.

The problem he addresses, simply stated, is that Texas is too large and too diverse to be a single political unit.

He points out that Texarkana is closer to Chicago than it is to El Paso, adding that Texarkana also may have more in common with Chicago than the desert southwest of El Paso, and El Paso is more likely to be related to Phoenix. Still, both Texas cities receive laws issued from Austin.

He provides other examples of the state's immensity. Texas is larger than the United States' 15 smallest states combined. In Texas, one can drive the same distance it is from New York to St. Louis. Would anyone suggest that everything between New York and St. Louis be made one state?

Many may not know that Texas need not have been as large as it is, nor need it remain so large. The joint resolution of Congress that brought Texas into the Union in 1845 contained an interesting, yet unused proposition:

"New States, of convenient size, not exceeding four in number, in addition to the state of Texas, and having sufficient population, may hereafter, by the consent of the State, be formed out of the territory thereof, which shall be entitled to admission under the provisions of the federal constitution ('United States at Large' 5:797-798)."

Whisenhunt adds that "Not only was the mechanism provided; most early Texans fully expected the power to be exercised shortly after annexation." Texas almost was five states.

Keeping a unit the size of Texas tied together is no small proposition. As pointed out previously, many geographic areas have little in common. Heritage, which ties all loyal Texans together, is also a tenuous connection. Everyone remembers Stephen F. Austin, The Alamo and Sam Houston, but the glorification of a specific area of history will carry only so far.

Whisenhunt notes that the average Texan's knowledge of state history stops with Texas' admission to the Union or the Civil War.

That Texas was the largest state in the nation for many years still contributes to state pride, but that pride was damaged in 1959 with the admission of Alaska, which is several times larger.

**Break-up**  
The meat of the matter — how

and where the state will break up — does not begin until the third chapter.

That the state is almost ungovernable is his strongest case. He cites not only the cost of moving legislators when they're in office but the cost of getting into office. In smaller states, one can travel from city to city easily, can purchase air time on a single tele-

**Everyone remembers Stephen F. Austin, The Alamo and Sam Houston, but the glorification of a specific area of history will carry only so far.**

vision station to cover the area, and need only purchase ads in one or two newspapers.

Texan candidates, however, must cover thousands of miles between cities, must purchase air time on many television stations and must choose which of the several state newspapers to advertise in.

Once a candidate is elected to office, he or she will be far from the average Texan, both financially and geographically. Few Texans have the opportunity to see their leaders or bureaucratic policy makers face to face. Whisenhunt asks whether a lawmaker should be able to make rulings on constituents who are not only far away, but living in considerably different conditions.

The state's self-named areas demonstrate the diversity. Resi-

dents have already broken Texas into East Texas, West Texas and the Hill Country, to name a few. Each term, according to the author, represents and describes a separate entity that should be governed locally.

**Problems**

The difficulties that would arise in breaking up the state come from more than the almost nationalist pride of its residents. Some of the new states would have mineral and forest wealth, while others would be relatively poor. Who would receive the money, and how would it be distributed?

He addressed the problem of the UT and Texas A&M Permanent University Fund. If Texas was split up, who would receive the income from the oil wealth that supplies that fund?

Answers are offered to some of these questions in the last third of the book, though they are often weak and he finds conflict within his own answers. Overall, the book lacks organization. The chapter titles are unclear and even misleading.

The second chapter, titled "Why?" does not answer why the state should be broken up, nor does it offer evidence why not leave it together. The third chapter, "Why Not?" fails again to clarify which side he is presenting.

It is, nevertheless, an interesting book in that it brings up issues that many loyal Texans prefer not to address. The state has serious economic problems and a very small number of people can afford to run for office. Whether or not those leaders should be able to legislate over such distances is a serious issue.

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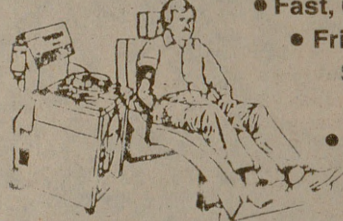
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# Previews

## Players revive long love affair

The story of a twenty-five-year love affair comes to **Rudder Forum Friday at 8 p.m.** when the Aggie Players present a version of the long-running Broadway play, "Same Time, Next Year."

The play also will be presented Saturday, March 30-31 and April 1 at 8 p.m.

Bernard Slade's romantic comedy tells the love story of George and Doris, who meet at an inn in 1951 and continue their affair for one weekend each year, even though both have children and happy mar-

riages. The play shows the phases George and Doris go through at different stages of their lives.

Senior theater arts major Ginny Green stars as Doris and Mark Hadley, a graduate student in English, stars as George. Theater arts professor Robert Wenck directs.

Tickets are on sale at Rudder Box Office for \$4 for students and \$5 for the general public. For reservations, call 845-1234.

The play replaces "A Question of Identity" on the Aggie Players season ticket subscription.