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HUSKER DU RAIDING THE WAREHOUSE

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Don't Fence Me In

With a major label deal and plenty of artistic control, the Huskers shoot for the best of both worlds

By Bruce McGuire

Photo by
Daniel Corrigan

Last April, Husker Du announced that when their current tour ended in May, they were planning to take a hiatus. After five years of nearly constant touring and a rapid-fire succession of critically-acclaimed albums, they were going to change their *modus operandi*. "We just gotta get back into digging Husker Du and being friends again," sighed Bob Mould, "instead of doing these tours and killing ourselves. So that's where it's at. The Huskers are going to cool out." Bassist Greg Norton added, "Ever since *Zen Arcade* came out, we've literally been on the road for a month, home for a week, on the road again, in the studio for two weeks, then out touring again. Constantly."

And so, in the past year, the Huskers have changed from a band that lives on the road to one that lives in more permanent dwellings. And that had something to do with the way their new double-LP set, *Warehouse: Songs and Stories*, came together. For one thing, the pacing was more deliberate. *Warehouse* is being released almost a year after their major label debut, *Candy Apple Grey* — quite a gap for a band that had released three single LPs and one double album in the previous year and a half.

"We sort of took the 'look before you leap' approach this time," explains drummer Grant Hart. "Part of the luxury of having time off is that our energy could be distributed over 70

minutes (of music) and two months, instead of 38 minutes and four days." The result is a smooth and shining thing, filled with a variety of moods and melodies, and — lest old acquaintances be forgot — plenty of the ferocious roar that has been their trademark. But compared to past Huskers albums, Mould says this one is more subtle.

Husker Du? Subtle? "It's one gigantic pool of moods," says Mould, "always getting swirled around. It might not make waves as big (as past albums), but it goes a lot further. All the elements are there. This record might be the ripples after the rock got thrown in the water." He pauses. "It's more like . . . falling

gracefully. We chose not to break any bones this time."

On hearing this, Hart chimes in: "But just because we brushed our teeth doesn't mean they're not sharp."

It's ironic that the hardcore scene that originally spawned Husker Du is perhaps best known for equal-opportunity amateurism, because that couldn't be further from the truth about the Huskers. Collectively, they're as hard-working a bunch of people as you're likely to find anywhere. Until last year, the band members controlled nearly every dimension of their careers — booking shows, making posters and T-shirts, answering phones, handling money, and producing records. Finally, as a concession to encroaching fame (and a load of paperwork), they hired an office manager. But the Huskers still call the shots, whether it's a matter of who shoots the video, who mixes the live sound, or how their records get made. As major label contracts go, their deal with Warner Bros. is pretty simple: Hands off; we'll do it our way.

Still, between the major label deal and the office manager and all this time off the road, some Huskers fans might have visions of the band falling back, becoming one of those "studio only" band/corporations. Not to worry, though. These guys were weaned on the road. They have asphalt in their blood. Starting in mid-February, they'll take off on a 12-week-plus American tour that will take them to new

LIFE ON THE ROAD

"You Can Take Everybody and Divide By 3 and That's Still a Lot of People"

—Grant Hart

Bob: This biker was beating up this girl's Jaguar in Des Moines. She wouldn't give him a ride, so he freaked out and slapped her and started pounding on the hood of her car. We hated her because she was heckling us at the show. But we ended up getting the hardware

out of the drum case to get rid of the guy. We didn't wail on him, we just said, "Get the fuck out of here." Then he goes across the street to get some of his friends, and we're standing there thinking we got ourselves into a good one! So finally the police show up and arrest her for disturbing the peace and they wanted to haul us in until we explained what happened. That was a good one.

And then in Idaho we were in a blizzard in the van with wet sloshy snow flying. Greg's driving and the snowplow is in the right lane

of the interstate and we're in the right lane

Greg: The snowplow is going about 20 mph. Then there's this truck we've been trying to pass for about 30 miles and everytime I pull out to pass him we'd hit this slush so I didn't want to start driving real fast. So, everybody is stuck behind the snowplow. The guy in the truck takes off and passes the plow and the three of us are going, "He made it, we can do it." The general consensus was, if we hit a long straightaway, let's go for it.



cities and bigger venues. Then it's off to Europe in the summer, and Canada in the fall. It should be an interesting tour, what with the Huskers hitting the road well-rested for practically the first time ever. It's also the first time they'll be going on the road with songs that weren't road-tested before they were recorded.

And the record they'll be showcasing? *Warehouse* is not exactly a concept album — just a higher brains-to-brawn ratio than the norm. The band took great care in sequencing the songs, and as a result, the whole thing really hangs together as an album. Not a single song seems out of place. One track, "Could You Be the One," was recently released in England as a single, with a non-album B-side by Norton, "Everytime." (Better latch onto the import if you're interested, though. Warners doesn't plan to release it here.) They've also shot a video for the single. Even the album's packaging, with its striking

"At our last First Avenue show [March '86] this guy came up and went, 'I work in a record department, and we're blowing your record out.' I said, 'Oh yeah, where's that?' And he said, 'Sears.'!"

—Greg Norton—

graphics and bright colors, shows the Huskers' penchant for taking care of business and making a big splash at the same time.

Okay, so they had a long time to make the

album. But does that mean they should have made a *double* album?

"We're our own worst critics," says Mould. "If we felt it should have been a single album, we would have made it one. We did it this way because we couldn't get rid of any of those songs. They're all equally important."

Warehouse is the Huskers' most carefully crafted record, both in terms of writing and recording. That craftsmanship makes the songs' melodies and pop structures more evident, but it should be noted that those qualities have always been there, all the way back to their first, *Land Speed Record* (1981). They've just been learning how to bring out those elements. "I don't see it as any more pop than *Flip Your Wig*," says Hart. "I would resist any inference that the songs are getting progressively more pop-sounding. The production is better, but if it's *not*, then we're not learning anything." ▲

Sure enough, there's that long straightaway and we've got the wipers on and it's like, "wow," this is fun. All of a sudden we hit this heavy duty slush and it's all over the windshield. The wipers stop and there is literally six inches of gucky snow stuck on. We couldn't see anything. I rolled down the window and there was a wall of slush, so Grant gets a little spot to see out so he grabs the wheel, now he's driving.

Bob: This nice big turn on the mountain comes up and we're all going "Oooohhhh . . ." Grant sort of looked out and saw the

guardrail before we would have gone down. He grabbed the wheel.

Greg: This is before Grant decided that since he was the only one who could see, that maybe he should steer. First he was giving me verbal commands like, "A little over to the left, no back over this way . . ."

Bob: I'm sitting in the back looking for the scraper, wanting to hand it up to someone who can lean out and get some of the snow off. We had to keep going; otherwise the snowplow would have blown us off the road, and then there was a school bus behind us too.

Greg: If we would've hit the guardrail we would have bounced back into the snowplow and gotten spun around into the bus, which would've spun into the 20 cars behind it. That definitely would have been a day to go down in Idaho state history.

Bob: It was one of those cases where the worst possible scenario almost did happen.

Bruce: They would have blamed it on the fact you were a rock band.

Bob: Yeah, it would have been called drug-induced or something, too. ▲

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