

# HUSKER DU - What Did They Do?



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## A Mainstream Critic Looks Back On A Band That Almost Mattered

By Jim Meyer

Husker Du, that monstrous creature born of punk rock's artistic retardation and bred by modern critical idiocy, is dead. I couldn't be much happier. Bob Mould told City Pages a few months ago that after the breakup "all that's important is everything we've accomplished." Let me ask anyone who really digs Husker Du: What the hell did they accomplish in their career?

Nothing really important comes to mind. These kings of the new rock movement usurped power, aggressively filling a leadership vacuum through an exhaustive cycle of touring, nonstop writing, and constant recording. They busted their asses, and copped the crown fair and square. But I will never believe, as so many others do, that their success was the natural product of undeniable artistic superiority. Now that they are stationary for the first time in their career, it's time to add it all up.

Their spiraling artistic progress is totally illusory, starting from the depth of *Land Speed Record*, which won the band the essentially meaningless and rather silly honor of "fastest band in the world."

Unfortunately, they never entered the Indy 500, but they did leave behind that unlistenable record as a dark age relic. Soon critics were marveling at the band's ability to progress through "hardcore," but those observers never asked if there was really anywhere to go but up. One spin of *Land Speed* will tell you there wasn't.

From there it was one quickie after another. An e.p. here, an e.p. there, all products of a one-trick Husker music formula of buzzing guitar rhythm, mindless clattering drums and witless vocal screams. The cheerleading "new rock" booster/critics were raving on cue and the band bought every line.

*Zen Arcade* was the first Husker set where their speed-rock habit and natural knack for hooks finally merged with some lyrics worth reading and acoustic musical touches thrown in for show.

Much of my disgust for this band stems from the appearance of self-importance that let them think every thought in their head was worth a song. They proceeded to litter their albums with the sad results of that impression. Before *Zen* had even sunk in, they poured out another redundant album, *New Day Ris-*

*ing*. It accomplished nothing musically, but through clever timing and a fluke of mass critical stupidity, was inexplicably linked with *Zen Arcade* in the *Village Voice Top 10*.

This feat was the final proof that the new rock critics had surrendered all duties of critical analysis for a lower calling: To hype the new sound into the mainstream whenever they could. Husker Du were sharp enough to see the need for raw material in the cool critic's world domination plan, and dutifully served up six sides in one year.

Unlike true artists, the Huskers were content to play their trick over and over. The relentless, immature formula belied any evidence of great artistic effort. Their songs were built on vague lyrics crammed into the most stifling rhyme schemes that ever survived junior high school. Their topics rarely stretched beyond their own world of self-doubt, paranoia, general frustration, confusion, and their totally uncaptivating speculations on interpersonal relations *ad nauseum*, rarely venturing to the real world that existed outside their own heads.