

# 1983: the year on record

## The readers speak out ...

At long last, here it is — *The Tech's* readers' poll of the best records of 1983. Because not everyone is on campus during Independent Activities Period, it is difficult to solicit and compile everyone's choices until after classes start in February. Oh, well, better late than never.

Over a hundred different bands or performers were mentioned by those who sent in their choices. Some of the records people listed were released late in 1982, but were included if their impact was more strongly felt during the past year.

One of the more surprising aspects of this survey was the blurring of lines separating different musical genres. Many records were listed in more than one category, and bands who play music which once was categorized as new wave are now firmly entrenched in the mainstream.

As a result, the bands were reshuffled into the following four categories: pop/rock/new wave, funk/r&b, punk, and local. In each grouping, points were tabulated for each performer and a weighted score was calculated, based on a score of 100 for first-place. The number of performers listed in each category was dependent upon the total number of responses received which listed choices in that category. OK?

Some survey respondents ranked their choices, while others did not. Those who did not supply rankings had their choices weighted equally; polls which did list records in order had their higher choices weighted proportionally more than their lower picks. The more different records a person listed, the more the higher picks (and the less the lower) counted.

In pop/rock/new wave, the Talking Heads' *Speaking in Tongues* was far and away the most popular album, being named on well over half the ballots received. The Police's *Synchronicity* finished a close second, with *More Fun in the New World* by X placing third.

The high fifth-place finish by the Irish band U2 was due to their having released

## Readers' poll pop/rock/new wave

1. Talking Heads — Speaking in Tongues	100.0
2. Police — Synchronicity	88.9
3. X — More Fun in the New World	78.5
4. Michael Jackson — Thriller	68.8
5. U2 — War/Under a Blood Red Sky	61.3
6. Prince — 1999	50.8
7. New Order — Power, Corruption, and Lies	42.9
8. B-52's — Whammy	38.3
9. Devo — Oh No, It's Devo!	34.5
10. REM — Murmur	33.5
11. Cure — Japanese Whispers/The Walk	26.1
12. David Bowie — Let's Dance	25.5
Dream Syndicate — Days of Wine and Roses	25.5
14. Elvis Costello — Punch the Clock	23.9
15. Pretenders — Learning to Crawl	23.0
16. Van Halen — Diver Down	22.0
17. Culture Club — Colour by Numbers	19.2
18. Bananarama — Deep Sea Skiving	18.2
19. Styx — Kilroy Was Here	15.3
20. Ministry — With Sympathy	14.7

two records during the past year — *War*, a studio album released toward the beginning of the year, and *Under a Blood Red Sky*, a live EP released at the end of the year. The votes for both records were tabulated together; if counted separately, *War* would have placed about tenth and the live record about twentieth.

The only bands mentioned which are not primarily identified with new wave (a term which has become largely meaningless) were Van Halen, placing 16th with *Diver Down*, and Styx, whose *Kilroy Was Here* finished 19th. Styx, David Bowie (a 12th-place tie for *Let's Dance*), and Michael Jackson (fourth place for *Thriller*) are the only performers in the pop top-20 who predate the new wave era.

Jackson and Prince (sixth place for *1999*) topped the funk/r&b choices in the

closest competition for first in any category. Ballots which named one tended to name the other. No one else came particularly close, with third-place Grandmaster Flash (rap singles "New York, New York" and "White Lines") garnering some support.

Suicidal Tendencies' self-titled album was the most popular punk/hardcore album of the past year, with Proletariat's *Soma Holiday* and Youth Brigade's *Sound and Fury* following. Again, several bands released more than one record during the past year. Only those records released on independent labels were considered in this category; X and the Ramones, both recording for major labels, were not counted.

Many of the local bands listed have yet to release any vinyl, but they were consid-

## ... but I have the last word

The ballots are in, and the readers have spoken. But now it's my turn to list my favorite records and bands of 1983. My choices were not significantly different from the compilation of picks on the surveys sent in to *The Tech* — I'll liberally interpret the result to mean people at MIT share my good taste in music. My selections are in approximate order of preference in each category, but don't hold me to it forever. Here goes:

### Pop/rock/new wave

X, *More Fun in the New World* — Super album whose fine production qualities cannot mask this group's powerful performance. At last, a punk band garners mass appeal.

Michael Jackson, *Thriller* — Real meaty and funky, this album kept me hopping all year. I especially love "Billie Jean." Only one bad song on the whole record, the duet with — what's his name? — McArtry? You know, the ex-Beatle.

Police, *Synchronicity* — A little mellow than their previous efforts, but excellent songs nonetheless. The ethereal quality of "Every Breath You Take" still sends me.

Prince, *1999* — This dude is unreal, but his extended funk jams make club DJs and dancers alike smile. Guaranteed to make a dull party go. Scratch, scratch, I'm delirious.

Talking Heads, *Speaking in Tongues* — Not my favorite album by this group, with its lengthy and somewhat pointless funk stylings, but still enjoyable. Overrated as a dance record.

Kinks, *State of Confusion* — I'm a Kink Kultist from way back, and while these guys are starting to get long in the tooth, there's a lot of life in them yet. Always interesting music from the band who invented the power chord.

David Bowie, *Let's Dance* — His worst album in a long while is still one of the year's best. Too much pandering to the disco crowd leaves this record a little flat.

New Order, *Power, Corruption, and Lies* — Compelling rhythms densely layered with synths and tape loops. "Blue

Monday" hits you over the head and forces you to dance.

U2, *War/Under a Blood Red Sky* — Two records in one year is fine with me, especially when they are this good. This is music played with intense feeling, and it shows.

XTC, *Mummer* — Out as an import long before its American release, this album writes yet another chapter in the story of a band strong on integrating offbeat rhythms into a pop format. XTC continues to evolve as a cohesive musical unit.

### Punk/Hardcore

Minutemen, *What Makes a Man Start Fires?/Buzz or Howl Under the Influence of Heat* — My favorite records of the year. Their quirky jazzed-up punk and innovative guitar work keeps riding around my turntable and refuses to leave.

Scream — Their self-titled debut album is an amalgam of many different styles, and even includes an acoustic piece. This band played only '60s covers at one show I attended, and only reggae at another.

Hüsker Dü, *Everything Falls Apart/Metal Circus* — Two releases which prove a band does not have to play lightning fast all the time to be powerful. As intense a band as there is.

Suicidal Tendencies — Another self-titled debut, dealing with the trials and tribulations of suburban teenage life. "Institutionalized" is a gem.

Government Issue, *Boycott Stabb/Make an Effort* — Once Washington D. C.'s most disliked band, the GI's have earned respect for their neo-psychedelic approach to hardcore.

Bad Brains, *Rock for Light* — Even a too-slick production job by the Cars' Ric Ocasek cannot destroy the intensity behind this all-black punk band, which has branched out and now performs primarily reggae.

Minor Threat, *Out of Step* — Even though the group has called it quits, this record is hardly a last gasp by any means. The creators of the "straight edge" philosophy.

Youth Brigade, *Sound and Fury* —

Three brothers comprise this band. The record, dedicated in memory of their father (a nice change from stereotypical anti-parent posturing) depends a little too heavily on chant-type singing.

Black Flag, *Everything Went Black* — They lay low in 1983 due to court battles with their former label, but did release this two-record set of demos. One side contains several humorous radio commercials.

Dirty Rotten Imbeciles, *Dirty Rotten EP* — DRI put 22 songs on a seven-incher. Eighteen minutes of the fastest thrash I have heard. You can't follow the words even with the lyric sheet.

### Local area

Mission of Burma — They were the best, are still the best, and always will be the best. R. I. P.

Proletariat — *Soma Holiday* is a great album, but the Proles have to be seen to be fully appreciated.

Freeze — A hot record, but their absence from the stage hurts them.

Psycho — Not a thrash band at all, so they tend to be overlooked. Big mistake. Their bassist is a virtuoso.

S. S. Decontrol — Perhaps overexpectation on my part cost them points here, but *Get It Away* is a good, if too-short, record.

F. U.'s — Their virulently pro-American stance has gotten them into hot water with some punks, but what of it? Appropriate cover of "We're an American Band" on their album.

Cheapskates — Great ska/punk band, really fun to dance to. Hopefully, a record is in the works.

Limbo Race — One of the potential successors to the Mission of Burma legacy, they are stylistically similar but lack that certain punch. Their record shows great promise.

Jerry's Kids — Gone but not forgotten. Maybe they'll come back.

Christmas — This trio has been bashing it out for years, but can't seem to get that one big break. Their sound is reminiscent of early Gang of Four.

Drew Blakeman

ered anyway as most have received radio airplay of demo tapes. The Proletariat were most popular, partly because they played on campus last fall. The second-place Boston band named, Mission of Burma, broke up last March but were counted anyway. Punk dominated the local choices, but bands playing various forms of pop were also listed by many.

Overall, there were not many surprises. The most popular bands and records tended to be the ones that sold well and became mainstays of radio playlists, which is generally the case in any such survey — after all, consumer acceptance breeds popularity which breeds more popularity, and the most widely heard music is often the best remembered once the year is out.

Few polls listed singles as opposed to albums, so a meaningful list cannot be compiled. Four songs by Jackson and "Safety Dance" by Men Without Hats were the only ones mentioned by more than one person. Nobody mentioned the tautological tedium that goes by the name Duran Duran at all, which means that no 14-year-old girls attend MIT, or if they do their tastes are better than average for their age.

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# ARTS

## Readers' polls funk/r&b

1. Michael Jackson	100.0
2. Prince	94.3
3. Grandmaster Flash	46.3
4. S.O.S. Band	25.3
5. Nina Hagen	23.2
6. Jenny Burton	21.1
6. Troublefunk	21.1
8. Malcom McLaren	16.8
9. Rick James	14.1
10. Herbie Hancock	10.5

## punk/hardcore

1. Suicidal Tendencies	100.0
2. Proletariat	82.8
3. Youth Brigade	79.3
4. Minutemen	69.0
5. F.U.'s	55.2
6. Husker Du	51.7
7. Government Issue	41.4
8. Minor Threat	36.2
9. Meatmen	34.5
10. Terveet Kadet	32.6
11. Black Flag	31.0
Misfits	31.0
Scream	31.0
14. Dickies	27.6
15. Freeze	25.9

## local bands

1. Proletariat	100.0
2. Mission of Burma	88.5
3. Jerry's Kids	53.8
4. F.U.'s	41.4
5. Freeze	39.8
6. November Group	38.7
7. Cheapskates	31.0
8. Turbines	29.4
9. Berlin Airlift	28.8
10. Psycho	28.3
11. S.S. Decontrol	26.5
12. Jon Butcher Axis	22.1
Pat Metheny	22.1
New Models	22.1
15. Sex Execs	18.8