Husker does

Zen Arcade, a new double LP by Husker Du on SST records; $10; 75 minutes.

Let's start by saying that this latest release, Zen Arcade, from Husker Du is a bit different. In fact, Husker Du itself is a bit different.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with them, Husker Du is Scandinavians meaning "do you remember" in a hardcore band from Minneapolis (the same city that brought you the phenomenon of Prince). Since their emergence around 1980 they have attracted a fairly large following among the hardcore crowd. To date they have released one live LP, two EP's, and one 45. Last year's Meat Circus EP gave just a slight hint of what was to come on Zen Arcade.

Zen Arcade is a double LP, which is very unusual for a hardcore band. Most bands of this genre have a hard enough time putting out a single LP. (The Minute Men, another hardcore band, have also just put out a double LP, but that is another review.) Make no mistake about it, however, there is not one second of filler on this record. This is not just four sides of hundred-mile-an-hour trash, or four sides of droning heavy-metal power chording. The musical style varies widely, displaying a range of musical influences ranging from folk-rock to the classics of Bo Diddley. Within the four sides of this album Husker Du has broken out of the confines that the hardcore label imposes on most bands.

Songwriters Bob Mould and Grant Hart use their songs to reflect their observations of life. Much of the album is cynical and angry, questioning the conventions imposed by society. The two songwriters also agree what people do and say in their everyday lives. The first song, "Something I Learned Today," sets the tone for much of the rest of the album.

"Something I learned today/Black birds flying through a grey day/Looking through the window pane/I'm not inside your brain/" is just a slight hint of what was to come on Zen Arcade.

Bob Mould and drummer Hart seem very concerned about the present state of affairs, and there is extreme urgency in their voices as they trade off vocals. In songs like "Taxi on the News," they exhibit no hesitation in their view of the world:

"If there's one thing that I can't explain/It's why the world has to have so much pain/With all the ways of communicating/We can't get in touch with who we're fighting/" A baby born and another one dies/A baby born and another one dies/That keeps us away from who we're loving/"

Greg Norton's bass provides a solid beat to all this philosophizing. In certain songs he displays amazing speed — check out the bass lines on "Reoccurring Dreams." The combination of Norton's bass and Hart's drumming produces a classic hardcore rhythm throughout the album. Of course, Husker Du couldn't be Husker Du without Bob Mould's tremendous efficiency on their instruments, and in spite of its length, "Reoccurring Dreams" does not ever approach tedium. At times it is very reminiscent of some of Jimi Hendrix's live jams.

Zen Arcade establishes Husker Du as one of the most important bands of any type to come out of the early 80's surge of bands. This album is worth listening to, even just for the wide range of styles that it displays. Husker Du obviously has a message to get across in their music and lyrics. They don't preach, they observe, and some of their observations are more than you would expect from a hardcore band.

Don't be put off by the price of a double LP; buy this album.

Adam Ryssdal

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