

# The History of Rock Music: 1976-1989

New Wave, Punk-rock, Hardcore

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## The Golden Age of Heavy Metal

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(These are excerpts from my book "[A History of Rock and Dance Music](#)")

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### *The pioneers 1976-78*

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Heavy-metal in the 1970s was Blue Oyster Cult, Aerosmith, Kiss, AC/DC, Journey, Boston, Rush, and it was the most theatrical and brutal of rock genres. It was not easy to reconcile this genre with the anti-heroic ethos of the punk era. It could have seemed almost impossible to revive that genre, that was slowly dying, in an era that valued the exact opposite of machoism, and that was producing a louder and noisier genre, hardcore.

Instead, heavy metal began its renaissance in the same years of the new wave, capitalizing on the same phenomenon of independent labels. Credit goes largely to a British contingent of bands, that realized how they could launch a "new wave of British heavy metal" during the new wave of rock music.

[Motorhead](#) (1), formed by ex-Hawkwind bassist Ian "Lemmy" Kilminster, were the natural bridge between heavy metal, Stooges/MC5 and punk-rock. They played demonic, relentless rock'n'roll at supersonic speed: *Iron Horse* (1977), *Metropolis* (1979), *Bomber* (1979), *Jailbait* (1980), *Iron Fist* (1982), etc. It took Kilminster ten years to find the right balance and the right line-up, but eventually he delivered the album that Motorhead was meant for, **Orgasmatron** (jun/jul 1986 - aug 1986).

The other pioneers of the new wave of heavy metal, [Judas Priest](#) (1) were rediscovering the evil iconography and gothic overtones of Blue Oyster Cult and Black Sabbath on their second album, **Sad Wings Of Destiny** (mar/jul 1975 - mar 1976). They became stars in the 1980s, when they embraced a futuristic and sadomaso look, and began crafting melodic and magniloquent power-ballads.

The first album by [Iron Maiden](#) (1), **Iron Maiden** (dec 1979 - apr 1980), both anthemic and menacing, was another groundbreaking synthesis of classic styles, from Deep Purple to High Tide, from Led Zeppelin to Rush. It only took the addition of vocalist Bruce Dickinson to turn albums such as **The Number Of The Beast** (jan 1982 - mar 1982) or the complex **Powerslave** (jul 1984 - sep 1984), which is almost progressive-rock, into

commercial successes.

[Diamond Head](#) (1), led by Guitarist Brian Tatler and vocalist Sean Harris, recorded one of the most original albums of British heavy metal, **Lightning To The Nations** (feb/apr 1980 - oct 1980), that wed Black Sabbath and King Crimson.

[Witchfinder General](#) were the most influenced by Black Sabbath and therefore acted as a transmission chain from hard-rock of the 1970s to doom-metal of the 1990s with albums such as **Death Penalty** (apr 1982 - sep 1982).

These bands pioneered the revival of heavy metal, but they all had to wait until the mid 1980s before reaping the (commercial) benefits of its boom. By then, a new generation of metal-heads were storming the charts. One of the most successful acts, [Def Leppard](#) (1), masters of guitar fierceness, tempo shifts and angular counterpoint, added electronic arrangements to **Pyromania** (jan/jul 1982 - jan 1983) and turned seismic jolts such as *Pour Some Sugar On Me*, off **Hysteria** (feb 1984/jan 1987 - aug 1987), into baroque artifices.

In the United States a band bridged, like no other, the worlds of new wave and of heavy metal: [Van Halen](#) (1), destined to become the first heavy-metal band ever to top the charts. Formed in Los Angeles by Holland-born virtuoso guitarist Eddie Van Halen (an acrobat of hammering chords, exhausting vibratos, melodic riffs and Hendrix-ian glissandos) and vocalist and sex-symbol David Lee Roth, they streamlined the genre on **Van Halen** (sep/oct 1977 - feb 1978), making it more appealing to the everykid, and then they redefined it for an even larger audience when they introduced the synthesizer, thus *Jump* (1984).

By 1984, heavy metal had become one of the most popular genres around the world.

### **Black metal 1982-85**

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Between 1982 and 1985 a truly international phenomenon took place: the "gothic" subgenre of heavy metal became a full-fledged genre, "black metal". [Angel Witch](#) opened the floodgates with **Angel Witch** (sep/oct 1980 - dec 1980). [Venom](#) (1) in England upped the ante of faster and louder metal with **Welcome To Hell** (aug 1981 - dec 1981), the album that pioneered growling vocals, and especially **Black Metal** (nov 1982 - nov 1982), while at the same time pushing the boundaries with the suite *At War With Satan* (1983). King Diamond's [Mercyful Fate](#) (1) in Denmark focused on macabre themes on **Melissa** (jul 1983 - oct 1983). The Swiss scene, galvanized by [Hellhammer](#), who only released the EP **Apocalyptic Raids** (mar 1984 - mar 1984) and three demo cassettes, yielded [Celtic Frost](#) (1), a group that added symphonic arrangements, rhythm machines, samples and sopranos to albums such as **Into The Pandemonium** (jan/apr 1987 - nov 1987). And [Helloween](#) (1) in Germany found the common denominator between heavy metal, Amon Duul and Wagner's operas: the epic and demonic ouvertures of **Walls Of Jericho** (sep/oct 1985 - dec 1985) abused melodramatic and martial overtones, not to mention panzer-like tempos and machine-gun riffs.

Black metal was particularly successful in Scandinavia, where the scene was launched by the compilation **Scandinavian Metal Attack** (mar 1984), and bands such as Bathory, Mayhem and Candlemass ensured that gothic rock remained a leading genre for the rest of the decade.

After a "satanic" trilogy in the "thrash" style of Venom (that ended with the brutal albeit majestic eight-minute *Enter the Eternal Fire*), Sweden's [Bathory](#) (1), the brainchild of multi-instrumentalist Quorthon (Thomas Forsberg), coined a truly "Nordic" style with the epic pagan mythological martial tour de force of the concept **Hammerheart** (jun 1989 - apr 1990), structured as a sequence of lengthy solemn oppressive suites.

Norway's [Mayhem](#) set an evil standard with the crushing EP **Deathcrush** (feb/mar 1987 - mar 1987) but recorded an album only much later with **De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas** (? 1992/? 1993 - may 1994), after vocalist Per-Yngve "Dead" Ohlin had committed suicide (1991) and bassist Christian "Count Grishnackh" Vikernes had murdered guitarist Oystien "Euronymous" Aarseth (1993).

### ***Pop-metal 1981-85***

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The idea was corrupted almost immediately by the bands of the "shock-rock" (or "metal-glam") scene, who owed more to Alice Cooper and Kiss than to Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin: [Twisted Sister](#) in New York, whose anthems *Bad Boys Of Rock And Roll* (1981) and *We're Not Gonna Take It* (1984) were worthy of the Who; [Motley Crue](#) in Los Angeles, whose *Live Wire* (1982), *Shout At The Devil* (1983), *Wild Side* (1987) and *Kickstart My Heart* (1989) were depraved but catchy sermons of street life; and [Gwar](#), the ultimate, vulgar instantiation of that idea.

[Joan Jett](#), the former Runaways prodigy, created an image of independent, wild, angry, rebellious female. Visceral anthemic singalongs such as *Bad Reputation* (1981) were not particularly original (basically, hard-rock with catchy pop refrains), but they made Jett a charismatic leader of the movement that would be called "riot grrrrls".

However, in the 1980s in the USA, heavy metal remained mainly a "pop-metal crossover", a genre that would peak in the mid 1980s with New Jersey's [Bon Jovi](#), led by melodramatic shouter John Bongiovi and acrobatic guitarist Richie Sambora, a band that coined a magniloquent style with *You Give Love A Bad Name* (1986), *Living On A Prayer* (1986), *Bad Medicine* (1988), *Lay Your Hands On Me* (1988) and *Blaze Of Glory* (1990), while at the same time exploiting sentimental cliches in the ballads *Wanted Dead Or Alive* (1986), *I'll Be There For You* (1988), *Bed Of Roses* (1992) and *Always* (1994).

A unique take on melodic hard-rock was pioneered by [Savatage](#) (1) in Florida. **Power Of The Night** (late 1984 - ? 1985) and especially the rock opera **Streets** (jan/jul 1991 - oct 1991) are both harrowing experiences and stylistic nightmares.

### ***Pomp and doom 1982-85***

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Other heavy-metal originals pursued pompous and futuristic themes. In New York, remnants of the Dictators mutated into [Manowar](#) (1), a heavy-metal band that specialized in glacial atmospheres, majestic medieval visions, Teutonic and Scandinavian mythology, Wagner-ian grandeur, art-rock arrangements, and, last but not least, Conan-like cartoons. Not surprisingly, echoes of Blue Oyster Cult and Rush populate **Battle Hymns** (? ? - ? 1982).

In Canada, [Voivod](#) (2) were even more explicit in their imitation of Conan The Barbarian, but even more unique in crafting a cerebral and claustrophobic style. **War And Pain** (jun

1984 - aug 1984) and, to a lesser extent, **Rrröööaaarr** (oct/nov 1985 - mar 1986) fine-tuned a spasmodic way to tell epic stories. Voivod finally achieved an original synthesis of heavy-metal jargons on **Killing Technology** (nov/dec 1986 - apr 1987). After incorporating electronic instruments on **Dimension Hatröss** (dec 1987/jan 1988 - jun 1988), they reached their artistic peak with **Nothingface** (aug 1989 - oct 1989).

A few USA bands pioneered the idea of insanely heavy riffs played at a slow pace, an extension and exaggeration of Black Sabbath's elementary, sub-human, horror hard-rock.

A Los Angeles band, [Saint Vitus](#), had the idea that would provide a career to a new generation of heavy-metal bands: take Black Sabbath's slowest and gloomiest riffs, and just play them over and over again. Albums such as **Hallow's Victim** (? 1985 - aug 1985) were obsessive repetitions of Black Sabbath clichés. A few years later, this music would be called "doom-metal".

Doom was also pioneered in Washington by [Pentagram](#) on albums such as **Pentagram**, reissued in 1993 as **Relentless** (? 1984 - feb 1985) and the more professional **Day Of Reckoning** (spring 1985/? ? - jun 1987), and in Chicago by [Trouble](#), whose **Trouble**, reissued in 1990 as **Psalm 9** (feb 1984 - mar 1984) can lay claim to have been the first released doom album.

Building on those foundations, Sweden's [Candlemass](#) singlehandedly invented "epic" doom-metal on **Epicus Domicus Metallicus** (feb 1986 - jun 1986) and especially **Nightfall** (jul/sep 1987 - nov 1987) that codified their style of crawling tempos, huge melodic bass lines (Leif Edling), quasi-mystical guitar harmonies (Lars Johansson) and deeply-emotional operatic vocals (Bror "Messiah" Marcolin).

Dutch power-trio [Gore](#) specialized in instrumental-only minimalist repetition of elementary and crushingly heavy riffs on **Hart Gore** (mar/jun 1986 - ? 1986) and **Mean Man's Dream** (jan 1987 - ? 1987).

### ***Speed-metal 1983-85***

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Los Angeles' "street" scene fostered the cross-pollination of hardcore (Bad Brains, Black Flag) and glam-metal.

Expanding on an intuition by the humble hardcore band D.R.I., "speed-metal" was invented by [Metallica](#) (23). They began under the auspices of punk desperation, which they vented with the epileptic fits of **Kill 'Em All** (may 1983 - jul 1983). The jugular shrieks (James Hetfield), the aerial raids by the guitars (Kirk Hammett, who had replaced original member Dave Mustaine, and Hetfield's rhythm guitar), the relentless rhythm (Danish-born drummer Lars Ulrich, bassist Cliff Burton) created a sense of suffocation that simply got worse as the album proceeded from *Hit The Lights* to *Metal Militia*. However, there were countless stylistic tours de force (reminiscent of Diamond Head) concealed in songs such as *Pulling Teeth* and *Seek & Destroy* and the anthemic *Four Horsemen* already belonged to another age. That age was officially inaugurated by **Ride The Lightning** (feb/mar 1984 - jul 1984), a work that documented the metamorphosis of "thrash-metal" (in which all instruments were "thrashed" with no attention for detail or for harmony) into "speed-metal" (in which melody, guitar solos, tempo shifts and song dynamics began to prevail). Suddenly, the lengthy and intricate pieces of **Master Of Puppets** (sep/dec 1985 - mar 1986) exhibited an elegant, glossy sound that was more appropriate for classical music than for rock'n'roll. The balance between supersonic

instrumental prowess, narrative ingenuity and romantic urgency had only a few precedents in the realm of progressive-rock. The band's constant evolution led to the pretentious and austere **And Justice For All** (jan/may 1988 - aug 1988) and to the classy pop-metal of **Metallica** (oct 1990/jun 1991 - aug 1991), a pensive work that introduced mid-tempo ballads and chamber strings, and that crowned their quest for the gravest atmosphere with *Enter Sandman*.

In the meantime, the fire-power of Dave Mustaine's [Megadeth](#) (2) in Los Angeles was no less terrifying on their first album, **Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good!** (dec 1984/jan 1985 - may 1985). The hyper-realism of **Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?** (oct 1985/mar 1986 - jul 1986) opened new avenues for the genre, while a new and versatile line-up crafted **Rust In Peace** (? 1989/? 1990 - sep 1990), Mustaine's emotional zenith, as well as the pretentious **Countdown To Extinction** (jan/apr 1992 - jul 1992).

The third member of the speed-metal triad, [Slayer](#) (1) were, first and foremost, the link between Venom's black metal and Death's death-metal, via **Show No Mercy** (nov 1983 - dec 1983) and a milestone such as **Reign In Blood** (? 1986 - oct 1986).

One more band stands out among the progenitors of speed-metal: [Exciter](#) (1), from Canada, who co-founded the genre with the explosive **Heavy Metal Maniac** (aug 1982 - jun 1983).

San Francisco boasted a whole bunch of speed-metal weirdos who debuted between 1985 and 1986: [Death Angel](#), with **Ultra Violence** (jun 1986 - apr 1987), [Exodus](#), with **Bonded By Blood** (jul 1984 - apr 1985), [Vicious Rumors](#), with **Soldiers Of The Night** (summer 1985 - jan 1986), and [Testament](#), with **The Legacy** (? ? - jul 1987).

New York groomed two of the best. [Anthrax](#) (1) crafted a few of the classics: **Spreading The Disease** (? 1985 - oct 1985), their subversive tribute to manic hardcore, **Among The Living** (oct/nov 1986 - mar 1987), a model of elegant incandescence, and, to some extent, the apocalyptic concept **Persistence Of Time** (nov 1989/feb 1990 - aug 1990). [White Zombie](#) (2) had begun with **Soul Crusher** (aug 1987 - nov 1987) and a proto-grunge sound that was abominable and formidable in the tradition of MC5 and Blue Cheer, but embraced speed-metal on the derivative **Make Them Die Slowly** (nov 1988 - mar 1989), and then tweaked the genre to produce the campy horror melodrama **La Sexorcisto** (may 1991 - mar 1992). A more serious attitude, coupled with futuristic production and nods to the fashionable clichés of grunge and industrial-metal, surfaced on **Astro-Creep: 2000** (? 1994 - apr 1995).

The second generation of speed-metal includes two bands from Arizona, [Flotsam & Jetsam](#) and [Sacred Reich](#).

The band that made speed-metal a universal language was [Sepultura](#) (12), formed in Brazil by vocalist and guitarist Max Cavalera. They began their pursuit of USA-style speed-metal with **Morbid Visions** (aug 1986 - nov 1986), a poignant prophecy of moral decay, but affirmed an original style on their third album **Beneath The Remains** (dec 1988 - may 1989). **Arise** (aug 1990/early 1991 - mar 1991) completed their historical mission, of fusing the majestic virtuosity of Metallica's sound and the atrocities of the nascent death-metal sound. Then Sepultura aimed for the mainstream, relaxing some of the ferocity and adding a touch of Brazilian music, on **Chaos A.D.** (? 1992/? 1993 - sep 1993), their least original but also most successful album yet. Their masterpiece, **Roots** (oct/dec 1995 - mar 1996), was a marriage of both worlds, a bold attempt at bridging the gap between avantgarde and mainstream via a cornucopia of promiscuous sounds (tribal orgies and horror extravaganzas, psychedelic solos and unorthodox sampling, catchy

rigmaroles and panzer riffs).

### ***Grindcore 1986-88***

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Under pressure from hardcore, the rhythm of heavy metal kept getting faster and faster, leading to Venom's **Welcome to Hell** and Slayer's **Show No Mercy**, the two manifestos of a new, epileptic kind of music. In the mid 1980s, New York's [Nuclear Assault](#) (1), a spin-off of Anthrax, officially inaugurated "grindcore" with **Game Over** (may 1986 - ? 1986), and perfected it with **Survive** (jan/fev 1988 - jun 1988). The roots of grindcore can actually be found in two of Boston's hardcore outfits of the 1980s, that introduced the two key elements of grindcore: the frantic beat and the growling vocals. Deep Wound, featuring the young J Mascis (on drums) and Lou Barlow, played the micro-songs of the EP **Deep Wound** (apr/may 1983 - ? 1983) at supersonic speed (the precursor of death-metal's "blast beat"). Siege, who recorded only a six-song demo tape and three tracks for a compilation in 1984, featured the growls of vocalist Kevin Mahoney.

The genre became immediately popular in Britain, where it simply followed in the footsteps of Crass and Discharge. [Napalm Death](#) (1), led by the phenomenal trio of raving lunatic Lee Dorrian, epileptic drummer Mick Harris and kamikaze guitarist Justin Broadrick, defined a new standard of ultrasonic rhythm and fragmented melodies on **Scum** (aug 1986/may 1987 - jul 1987) and raised it to a wall of desperate noise on their milestone recording, **From Enslavement To Obliteration** (? 1988 - sep 1988).

The grindcore and death-metal cultures met when [Carcass](#) (1) released **Reek Of Putrefaction** (dec 1987/mar 1988 - jul 1988), a horror nightmare narrated by a zombie that made the term "magniloquent" seem a pathetic understatement. After approaching "music" on **Symphonies Of Sickness** (jul/aug 1989 - nov 1989), they refounded the genre with the lengthy pieces (a contradiction in terms) of **Necroticism: Descanting The Insalubrious** (summer 1991 - oct 1991). [Bolt Thrower](#) (1) debuted with a concentrate of grindcore clichés, **In Battle There Is No Law** (apr 1988 - jun 1988), but their second album, the "fanta-macabre" concept **Realm Of Chaos** (jul 1989 - oct 1989), was one of the most original works of the school.

### ***Death-metal 1987-89***

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In the meantime, under the same pressure of ever increasing frenzy, "black metal" was mutating into "death-metal". "Death-metal" was born from the fusion of Slayer's speed-metal, Helloween's black metal, and Napalm Death's grindcore. Death-metal rapidly developed easily recognizable features (because they were so extreme and so "un-musical"): disgusting horror lyrics, guttural growling vocals, distorted guitar, downtuned bass, epileptic drums (the so called "blast-beats"), abrupt tempo and signature changes.

The term was coined by [Possessed](#) in San Francisco, for their **Seven Churches** (apr 1985 - oct 1985), but the cradle of the genre was truly Florida, that would soon count on a number of vicious, truculent, brutal bands.

[Death](#) (1) opened the party with **Scream Bloody Gore** (summer 1986 - mar 1987), but their most accomplished fantasy was **Leprosy** (apr 1988 - oct 1988), and they reintroduced technical skills on **Human** (apr 1991 - oct 1991), as well as coined a new "progressive" form of death-metal on **Individual Thought Patterns** (spring 1993 - jun

1993).

Even tighter and darker was **Deicide** (mar 1990 - jun 1990), although [Deicide](#) (1) would never match its bloodlust. [Morbid Angel](#)'s **Altars Of Madness** (? 1988 - may 1989) and [Obituary](#)'s **Slowly We Rot** (? 1988/? 1989 - apr 1989) were more predictable. Nonetheless, it would be Obituary's **The End Complete** (? 1991 - apr 1992) that would establish death-metal as a viable mainstream genre, followed by Morbid Angel's **Covenant** (? 1992/? 1993 - jun 1993).

Compared with the simple canon of the Florida bands, the albums by San Francisco's [Sadus](#) (1), such as **Illusions**, reissued in 1991 as **Chemical Exposure** (apr/jul 1988 - ? 1988), were articulate and (relatively speaking) baroque.

Death-metal conquered continental Europe via **Consuming Impulse** (? 1989 - dec 1989), the second album by Dutch quartet [Pestilence](#).

### ***Progressive-metal 1986-89***

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Heavy-metal in the 1980s was not only frenzy and noise. There were bands experimenting with all sorts of crossovers and hybrids. New York's eclectic [Living Colour](#) (1), a group of Afro-Americans featuring Hendrix-ian guitarist Vernon Reid and drummer William Calhoun, offered a sophisticated mixture of blues, hard-rock, funk and jazz on **Vivid** (? 1987/? 1988 - may 1988). [24-7 Spyz](#), coming from the same cultural roots, fused the sounds of the violent white youth (hardcore and heavy metal) with the sounds of the violent black youth (rap, funk, reggae). Another example of white/black fusion was Oregon's multi-racial [Dan Reed Network](#).

Progressive-metal blossomed in Seattle, where [Queensryche](#) (1) penned one of its masterpieces, the concept album and psychodrama **Operation: Mindcrime** (spr/sum 1987 - apr 1988). Other intricate and solemn metal albums were recorded in the Seattle area by [Sanctuary](#), particularly **Refuge Denied** (? ? - ? 1987), and keyboardist Gregg [Giuffria](#), whose long career peaked with **House Of Lords** (? ? - ? 1988).

Ohio's [Fates Warning](#) attained an even higher level of abstraction than Queensryche with **No Exit** (oct/dec 1987 - mar 1988) and especially **Perfect Symmetry** (apr/may 1989 - aug 1989), not to mention the 12-movement concept album **A Pleasant Shade Of Gray** (dec 1996 - apr 1997), albums highlighted by Ray Alder's psychotic vocals, convoluted rhythms and sophisticated counterpoint.

In Texas, [King's X](#) (1) pursued a brand of prog-metal similar to Rush's with **Gretchen Goes To Nebraska** (? ? - ? 1989), while [Pantera](#) (1), who had been playing pop-glam-metal for the whole decade, eventually changed style and invented something new with the granitic **Cowboys From Hell** (dec 1989 - jul 1990).

A few guitarists ignored the lure of the group stardom and focused on their original style. [Joe Satriani](#) (1) led the pack with the soulful impressionism of **Surfing With The Alien** (dec 1986/aug 1987 - oct 1987), but it was [Eric Johnson](#) (1) who broke new ground with **Tones** (aug/nov 1985 - apr 1986), a staggering display of virtuoso playing, although he became famous with the more conventional *Cliffs Of Dover* (1989).

### ***Street sound, 1987***

Los Angeles ended the decade with the epic sound of the "street scene", a wild and raw hard-rock sound that was drenched in hyper-realism, nihilism, anger and desperation; the quintessential soundtrack of urban alienation. In the tradition of the Rolling Stones and the Sex Pistols, [Guns N' Roses](#) (11) were a band of psychopaths, delinquents, sex maniacs, junkies and alcoholics who liked to show and sound what they were. **Appetite For Destruction** (aug/dec 1986 - jul 1987) was as harrowing an experience as being catapulted into a dark narrow alley of the worst Los Angeles neighborhood. William "Axl Rose" Bailey's nasty, offensive, anti-heroic vocal acrobatics fended off the double-guitar attack of Saul "Slash" Hudson and Jeff "Izzy Stradlin" Isabell, who indulged in unbridled concertos of screeching and reckless riffs. The noise, the energy, the lyrics transformed each song into a bloody fistfight. **Use Your Illusion** (jun 1990/jun 1991 - sep 1991) added artistic pretensions to the rebellious spirit of their performances, and, in a sense, declared the band's mission impossible.

The commotion was unjustified in the case of [Jane's Addiction](#) (1), one of the most over-rated bands of the era, led by hysterical singer Perry Farrell and demonic guitarist David Navarro. **Nothing's Shocking** (jan/apr 1988 - aug 1988) was certainly a powerful fresco of moral decay and insecurity (expressionistic shrieks, heavy-metal thunders and psychedelic vertigoes), but its artistic pretenses were not supported by adequate skills, and **Ritual De Lo Habitual** (early 1990 - aug 1990) sounded like a childish version of Led Zeppelin.

[Faster Pussycat](#) (1) harked back to the outrageous antics of Rolling Stones, Aerosmith and New York Dolls on **Faster Pussycat** (? ? - jul 1987) and especially **Wake Me When It's Over** (? ? - aug 1989). [LA Guns](#) were the least theatrical and violent of the founding fathers.

Not all L.A. metal band were glam-rockers: [Big F](#) (1) **Big F** (? 1987/? 1988 - ? 1988), led by John "Shreve" Crawford (who had written Berlin's hits), played an original mixture of blues-rock and heavy metal.

### ***Funk-metal 1984-86***

One of the great "fusion" ideas of the 1980s was the idea of integrating the brutal rhythmic and vocal styles of funk and rap music with the brutal guitar-driven style of heavy metal. The pioneering albums by the [Red Hot Chili Peppers](#) (2), **Red Hot Chili Peppers** (apr 1984 - aug 1984) and **Freaky Styley** (may 1985 - aug 1985), basically discovered what George Clinton and Jello Biafra had in common. The punkish impetus of these albums was due in large part to the mesmerizing style of former Fear bassist Michael "Flea" Balzary, but also to their (sub)cultural background: the decadent, histrionic and irreverent Hollywood scene. The excessive heavy-metal overtones of **The Uplift Mofo Party Plan** (may 1987 - sep 1987) missed the point, and, when John Frusciante replaced guitarist Hillel Slovak who had died of an overdose, the band adopted a mainstream sound. **Mother's Milk** (nov 1988/mar 1989 - aug 1989) and **Blood Sugar Sex Magik** (may/jun 1991 - sep 1991) left the rage and the sarcasm behind, yet another sign that the whole Los Angeles scene was going through a painful rehabilitation program.

A milder and more satirical approach to funk-ska-soul-rock fusion was propounded by [Fishbone](#) (2). The best document of their frantic, exuberant, exhilarating style was their

debut EP, **Fishbone** (? 1985 - sep 1985). Fishbone continued a tradition that dated as far back as the Coasters and had survived via Madness. That party music modeled after high-school pranks grew into an art form on **Truth And Soul** (jan/feb 1988 - sep 1988) and achieved a formidable synthesis of ancient and modern, of white and black, of "low" and "high" art, on **Reality Of My Surroundings** (nov 1990/jan 1991 - apr 1991), an album that was both ambitious and amusing.

San Francisco expanded on the idea with the creative and satirical work of two of the greatest bands of the late 1980s. [Faith No More](#) (12) created a stylistic hybrid that was both inventive, dynamic, driving and catchy. **We Care A Lot** (? 1984/? 1985 - may 1985) attempted a fusion/fission of genres that were virtually in opposition, such as punk-rock, funk, progressive-rock, hip-hop, heavy metal, music-hall. The fearsome trio of keyboardist Roddy Bottum, vocalist Chuck Mosley and guitarist Jim Martin perfected their counterpoint on **Introduce Yourself** (mid 1986 - apr 1987), a cauldron of memorable riffs, anthemic melodies, eccentric sound effects, elaborate scores, fiery electronic sounds. The group shone across a repertoire that ran the gamut from naive and romantic to cold and symphonic. Mr Bungle's vocalist Michael Patton took the helm of the band on **The Real Thing** (dec 1988/jan 1989 - jun 1989), which didn't change direction at all, despite increased mainstream appeal. The same balance of antipodal elements (of gloom and lightness, of ethereal and aggressive) propelled the versatile songs of **Angel Dust** (jan/mar 1992 - jun 1992).

On the other hand, the reckless stylistic cross-breeding of [Victim's Family](#), starting with their debut album **Voltage And Violets** (? 1986 - ? 1986), harked back to the skewed jazz-core of Minutemen, despite the theatrics of guitarist Ralph Spight.

The first star of this new crossover style, [Lenny Kravitz](#), recycled the fusion of soul, funk and rock pioneered by Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone and Prince on **Let Love Rule** (oct 1988/? 1989 - sep 1989), while [Terence D'Arby](#)'s **Introducing The Hardline** (feb 1987 - jul 1987) leaned towards the "soul" side of the equation.

### ***Grunge 1985-86***

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New York witnessed a revival of hard-rock rooted in the blues-rock tradition with [Raging Slab](#) and the [Masters Of Reality](#), but hard-rock staged its biggest come-back in Seattle. The influence of the new Seattle bands would be far greater than anyone imagined at the time. The groups that began their career in the second half of the 1980s coined the psychedelic/hard-rock style that would become one of the most sensational events of the following decade.

[Green River](#) (1) were formed by vocalist Mark "Arm" McLaughlin, bassist Jeff Ament and guitarists Steve Turner and Stone Gossard. Grunge was basically born with their debut EP, **Come On Down** (dec 1984 - may 1985). The EP **Dry As A Bone** (jun 1986 - jul 1987) and the only full-length, **Rehab Doll** (aug 1987/jan 1988 - jun 1988), developed their passion for Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Sixties garage-rock. When Green River split, Gossard and Ament formed Mother Love Bone and Pearl Jam, while Arm and Turner formed Mudhoney.

Jack Endino's [Skin Yard](#) played cold, frigid, inhuman heavy metal influenced by the Swans and Black Sabbath, for example on **Skin Yard** (? 1985/? 1986 - jan 1987).

The [Screaming Trees](#) (2), led by vocalist Mark Lanegan, wed folk-rock, hard-rock and

psychedelic-rock on their early albums, particularly **Even If And Especially When** (? 1986 - ? 1987). They progressed from a punkish mixture of Sixties garage-rock, power-pop and roots-rock to a uniquely ethereal style, that reached a transcendent majesty on **Sweet Oblivion** (mar 1992 - sep 1992), an ambitious endeavour that ran the gamut from Blind Faith to Neil Young, and on **Dust** (early 1995/? 1996 - jun 1996), a largely atmospheric work whose arrangements were almost symphonic.

The [Melvins](#) (2) rediscovered "stoner-rock" by exaggerating Blue Cheer's and Black Sabbath's slow, heavy, dark grooves. Buzz Osbourne (vocals and guitar) Dale Crover (drums) and Matt Lukin (bass) first sketched out the idea on **Gluey Porch Treatments** (oct 1986 - end 1986). After Lukin joined Mudhoney, Osbourne, Crover and new bassist Lori Black fully developed that idea with **Ozma** (may 1989 - ? 1989), where songs became monoliths of ugly, repetitive, massive chords, stretched to titanic proportions; Tibetan meditation in hell. Thus their masterpieces were lengthy, monotonous, obsessive pieces, somewhere between a stream of consciousness and a slow-motion dinosaur walk: *Boris*, off **Bullhead** (? 1990 - may 1991); *Charmicarmicat*, off the EP **Eggnog** (may 1991 - aug 1991); *Hung Bunny*, off the mini-album **Lysol** (? ? - ? 1992). The trio abandoned that pathological mania on **Houdini** (? 1992/? 1993 - sep 1993) and **Stoner Witch** (jul 1994 - oct 1994), which collect "songs" and not just heavy loads of unpleasant riffs. Later, the Melvins became likely candidates to the title of most self-indulgent band in the world.

Green River's founders Stone Gossard and Jeff Ament formed [Mother Love Bone](#), and started a new career with **Apple** (sep/nov 1989 - jul 1990), an album that sounded like a collection of Led Zeppelin leftovers. When their vocalist, Andrew Wood, died of an overdose, the two formed yet another band, [Pearl Jam](#) (2) that went on to become one of grunge's icons. Pearl Jam invented (or re-invented) a hard-rock sound that changed the world, and established a new standard of professional ethics. Fronted by former San Diego surf-punk Eddie Vedder, they shunned any intellectual pretense and focused on the guitar riff. One could almost claim that their entire opus is made of one melodic idea and one riffing idea. They turned obsolescence into an ideology. **Ten** (mar/apr 1991 - aug 1991) was majestic and theatrical, and clearly found a middle path between the extreme violence of hardcore and the brainy music of alternative rock, because **Vs.** (mar/may 1993 - oct 1993) established the record of copies sold in the first week of release. Both more pensive and more melodic, **Vitalogy** (nov 1993/oct 1994 - dec 1994) showed that there was a soul underneath the cliches.

[Mudhoney](#) (2), Mark "Arm" McLaughlin's and Steve Turner's band, were, instead, garage-rockers. The incendiary, elementary sound inaugurated with the single *Touch Me I'm Sick* (1988), the EP **Superfuzz Bigmuff** (oct 1988 - nov 1988) and the album **Mudhoney** (jul 1989 - nov 1989) was an interesting blend of garage-rock cliches (visceral distortion, sloppy riffs, anthemic melodies) and hardcore cliches (thrashing rhythm, epileptic vocals, demented rigmaroles). **Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge** (spring 1991 - jul 1991) tidied up the mess and sprayed the stench, but, basically, one could claim that Mudhoney continued to play the same song over and over again.

The riff became a totem with [Soundgarden](#) (2), fronted by Chris Cornell, one of the few vocalists who could be both emphatic and monotonous within the same song, propelled by guitarist Kim Thayil, one of Tony Iommi's and Jimmy Page's greatest disciples, and anchored to the seismic rhythm section of bassist Hiro Yamamoto and drummer Matt Cameron. **Ultramega OK** (spring 1988 - oct 1988) and **Louder Than Love** (dec 1988/jan 1989 - sep 1989) counterfeited the classic sound of Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, and enhanced (at least on the former) it with a bit of punk-rock fury and heavy-metal tension, but the masses loved it, and the band's routine (and sell-out) led to the massive success of

**Badmotorfinger** (spring 1991 - oct 1991), although **Temple Of The Dog** (nov/dec 1990 - apr 1991), a joint effort between half of Pearl Jam and half of Soundgarden, was probably more sincere and original. The bad news is that Soundgarden was playing on automatic pilot, but the good news was that they were capable of crafting the most baroque form of hard-rock ever. The tour de force of **Superunknown** (jul/sep 1993 - mar 1994) was not only the zenith of their mannerism, but perhaps grunge's ultimate swan song.

Other forms of proto-grunge were the loud and vulgar style of [Tad](#) (Tad Doyle's band), and the feverish and bluesy style of [Voodoo Gearshift](#).

Seattle became a gold mine with [Nirvana](#) (2), formed by vocalist/guitarist Kurt Cobain and bassist Krist "Chris" Novoselic. They, too, played hard-rock, but they also injected abnormal doses of emotion into it and had a melodic flair that the others lacked. **Bleach** (dec 1988/jan 1989 - jun 1989) was rudimentary, savage and fragile. **Nevermind** (apr/jun 1991 - sep 1991), featuring new drummer Dave Grohl (ex-Scream), increased the melodic factor, and found an even more unlikely balance between pathos and disgust, tenderness and rage, melancholy and rebellion. If **Nevermind** had been the manifesto of an age, the brutal **In Utero** (feb 1993 - sep 1993) was Cobain's personal odyssey. Sounding like Neil Young's timid alter ego, they embodied the mood of their generation (the "teen spirit"). Their sound became the soundtrack of a generation's nervous breakdown. And more so when Cobain took his life in 1994.

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