

SONIC-YOUTH



Last issue I ranted and raved about Sonic Youth's "Confusion is Sex" LP. I was so excited by the album that I decided an interview was in order. The following interview was conducted with Thurston Moore (vocals, guitar). Not present were Lee Rando (guitar, bass), Kim Gordon (vocals, bass), and Bob Bert (drums). Their latest album, "Kill Your Idols" (available as a German import) was not out at the time of writing, but should be out now as you read this.

BY BOZ

PHOTOS BY CATHERINE BACHMANN

Q: How did Sonic Youth get started?

A: I started it pretty much. All of us had played in different bands, except for Bob. I was playing in a band called the Coachmen who were a really Velvets kind of thing during the no-wave days. Kim was playing with this band called CKM which was her and this girl, Christine who was later the drummer for Malaria and this girl, Miranda who now does records under Thick Pigeon. Lee was playing in a band that was real Talking Headish called the Flux and then he started playing with Glenn (Branca) and that's how I met him. I sort of knew Lee a little and asked him if he wanted to play with us. That was probably over two years ago.

Q: You once described Sonic Youth as a cross between Black Flag and Throbbing Gristle...

A: Yeah, I kinda described that to a few people that asked me what it was like...it was sort of what I came up with...at that time maybe I thought that...asah...I like the Black Flag, part of it...I think Throbbing Gristle...I like their music in sort of the immediate sense, but I really despise Genesis Porridge and all that he stands for. His fascination for Satanism, I just don't want

to hear it. I think it's pretty sick.

Q: Yeah, he's a pretty sick guy.

A: He's serious about it; it's not just a play thing. Somebody like that could probably scare me to death and I'm sure he knows how to torture people from afar as far as enemies go...the evil side of it all...he's pretty knowledgeable.

Q: Did you ever meet him?

A: No, I never did. Some friends of mine last week met him. They were here last week, Psychic T.V. and supposedly they were incredible. I'd imagine they were. My friend was telling me how the group has slave boys with them who go out and pick up people for satanic orgies after the show. Ultimately, that just bores me; I think it's useless. I feel more along the lines of Black Flag, that attitude.

Q: What's more important to you: the message in your lyrics or the sounds you make?

A: I don't really put one over the other. The lyrics are usually...we like the lyrics to have a certain ambiguity...they mean a certain thing to us...they are important. Some of the lyrics are written while rehearsing a song and singing the first thing that comes to your

mind and liking it. Others are written beforehand.

Q: What were you thinking when you called your last album "Confusion is Sex"?

A: We were thinking of calling it "Confusion is Next" which was one of the songs on it and "Confusion is Sex" came out of...sort of having fun with it...

Q: Can you tell us about Neutral, the label you're on?

A: I don't think we're going to be dealing with them too much more. There's been a lot of hassle with them. It's the same silly problems with money and stuff. We're gonna be recording new stuff. There's a new record coming out on Zensor Records, a label out of Berlin. They're really nice. They're gonna license the first album and "Confusion is Sex" cause a lot of people just can't get the records at all. They can't find hardly any American records which is a real shame. They're curious about it, but a lot of it's not available. They're glutted by British music and it really shows in the music that's coming out through the rest of Europe.

Q: How did you ever set up your European tours?

A: The first time Glenn Branca had a tour set and asked both Lea and I to play on it. We went with him and were making like \$300 a week and saved up all the money and flew the other two over. While we were over there every city we were at we got a gig and wound up doing this 10 day tour. We came back and immediately set up another one.

Q: How did you finance the second tour?

A: How did we? I really don't remember. I think we borrowed some money and got an advance from Zensor...basically all we had to do was buy plane tickets. We've been pretty lucky. I mean we come back with no money, we're in the hole, but ultimately, it's worth it.

Q: Where did you play exactly?

A: We went everywhere. Every country except for the iron curtain countries. A lot through Switzerland and Germany; Germany being our most responsive audience. Holland also. Punk is like everywhere over there. We don't exactly attract a total punk audience when we go over there, but sometimes we do and it's real weird. You go to places like Switzerland where it's a very rich country and the people are just frustrated. My first experience with it was this gig there and the whole audience was just leather jackets and mohawks and they'd have National Front written on their chests. It was blind facism cause they didn't really know what it meant. It was just like cool...They do a lot of drugs and get totally drunk and there were teenagers sniffing glue in front of us while we were playing, passing out. It didn't matter who we were. It was just like an excuse for them to lose their minds in this rich countryside. It was real depressing to see that happening...

Q: What was Berlin like?

A: That's, for some reason, our hottest spot. When we play there we're really big. I really like it.

Q: What bands did you play with over there?

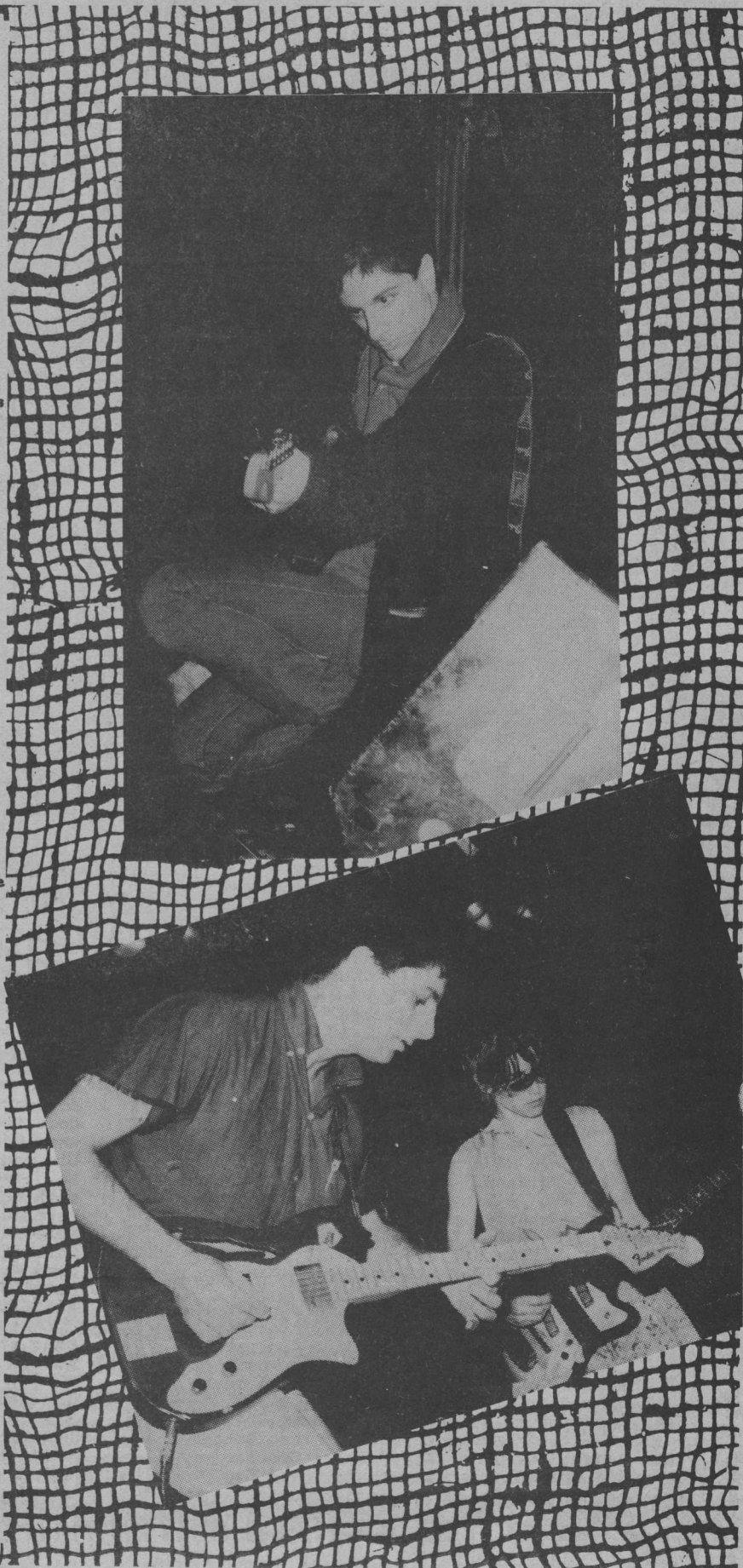
A: We played with three bands that we all at one time really liked and they all were horrible and sort of sold out. One was PIL in Holland. They were just disgusting. Johnny has a New Jersey cover band playing the songs. I can see what he's doing; he's sorta saying, you want this big rockstar, you want the Police, here I am...

Q: It seems to me to be more out of laziness...

A: It is. He's very bored with the idea, but it's not a new idea. Andy Warhol was doing that ages ago. He looked like Bozo the clown. I felt very sorry for him. The other band was Alan Vega, who in Suicide I used to think was totally incredible. It was the same kind of band backing him, but even more pedestrian. Then we played with SPK who I'd seen before and I thought they were incredible. What they did now was play behind a tape of disco dance stuff with all this metal on stage that you couldn't hear. It was pretty lame.

Q: Well that's disappointing.

A: Yeah, I know. London has this new thing; the





new trend is all these metal bands. I can't begin to start talking about how despicable London is as far as a music scene. It's utterly gross and I just couldn't wait to get out of there. In London they just gave us a hard time, the clubs and everything...

Q: So what's NY like these days?

A: Well, we've been away two months, things change...I'm really supportive of what goes on here and there really isn't any other support here. Most scenes have a very supportive thing happening like the West Coast, the fanzines generating interest in their scene. The fanzines and what not generate interest in their scene and at the same time I think it really adds to the creativity that comes out of it cause I really think it makes people work harder. Here there really isn't that. We're considered the media eye of the United States. The rock scene is just not supported here. The only paper we have is the Village Voice. Robert Christgau makes the decisions as to who will be exposed here. He thinks that pop like the Individuals is the only worthwhile thing pretty much. We have a lot of hard problems with this cause nothings being generated. I mean we're

generally considered to be pretty out...he hates us. He despises us. He thinks we're destroying all that he stands for. The hardcore scene is here. There are some good bands like Heart Attack.

Q: How is your band accepted within the hardcore contingent?

A: Well, at first nobody knew who we were cause we had nothing to do with it, fashion-wise and we're all a little older. I'm the youngest and I'm 25. The thing is we were all very fascinated with hardcore from the beginning. We never went out and decided to play thrash...we didn't find it necessary. It wasn't in our hearts. We're really interested in carrying it to another degree. At this point we're accepted more. The only hardcore gig we ever did was this benefit for the Vancouver 5 this summer. Most of the kids never saw us, some heard about us, but were not sure what we were about. We had no direct audience here. The real arty people don't come see us cause we're really not like that. The hardcore punks won't come see us cause we're not totally stylized.

Q: So you're kinda caught inbetween...

A: Yeah. We're kinda caught inbetween some-



track studio and we were together no more than a month. Glenn (Branca) came and saw us and said, I'm gonna start this record company and I want you guys to be the first thing. He got a great deal on this 24 track studio. We did all the songs in one day and mixed it the next day. After a year we were getting into material that allowed for more spontaneity and it got much more hard-edge. So we went into the studio and all the songs came out different than they did live...we just crashed 'em out. We're really not that pleased with it. Some of the songs just don't come off like they should. The only song I really like is the first song "Bad Mood" and the thing Lee did. I like "Inhuman" a bit and the song Kim wrote "Making the Nature Scene." This new one "Kill Your Idols" was recorded in the same place and was recorded direct to two track, so it's very alive. I'm curious to see how it will sound on vinyl. I feel very happy to be in the States as far as music's concerned. Bands like Black Flag, Saccharine Trust, Swans...especially Void. They're just incredible...the band to end all bands...Husker Du...the whole thing.

where. Anyway, we played that show and it was great. The kids really seemed to love it.

Q: Which bands do you usually play with?

A: The ones I like that we play with...this band called the Swans. We're very good friends with them. When we were pretty new we even did a couple tours of the States together to audiences of 10 to 20 people. Their music is so extreme...it's probably the hardest music...you've heard the album (yes)...it's like Peter, Paul, and Mary compared to them live if you could imagine. Some people just can not stand it. It's either a love or hate thing. It's nice to have a band like that from New York espically where we all live which is the low rent area, the lower east side. We're all pretty poor and live in these low rent apartments. It's pretty ragged around here and the Swans really mirrored alot of that I think. There's a band here called Live Skull that's good. There's a band called Den King who are sort of an extension of a band called Mars. There's a band called Rat At Rat R out of Philadelphia who are O.K. They're sort of similar to the sound we have and the Swans have. It's sort of flattering to see a band having our influences coming in. They're pretty good. They're more Birthday Partyish in a way. Heart Attack's a good band. I'm sort of disgusted with New York at the moment. Basically what I want to do is stay home and work...work on more music.

Q: Is the band a full time job?

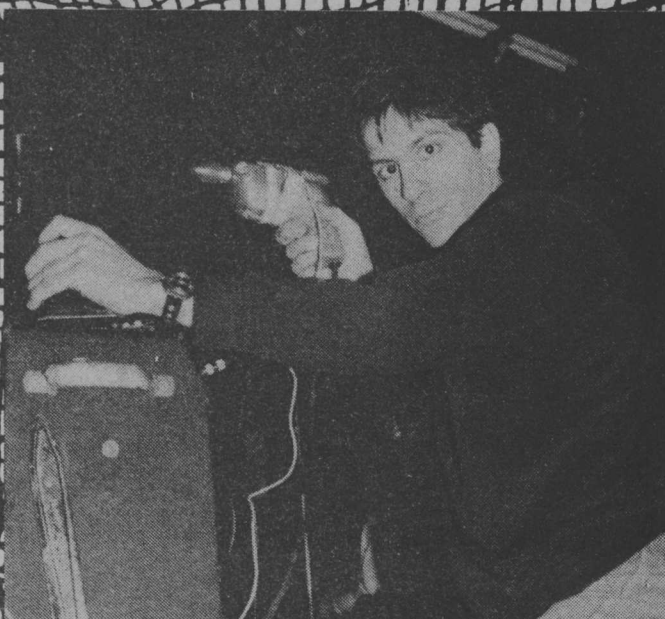
A: Yeah, Pretty much. It's all most of us do. I mean we work at day jobs to make money. We don't make any money as a band.

Q: How long did it take to record "Confusion is Sex"?

A: It took forever because we recorded in this basement and we were the first band to use it. We were like the guinea pigs and everything was falling apart, tapes were getting mangled...which we used anyway...there was alot of mangled tape that went on the record.

Q: The lp seemed to be really heavy on the white noise level, kinda like "Sister Ray" or something. Was that deliberate or just the way it turned out?

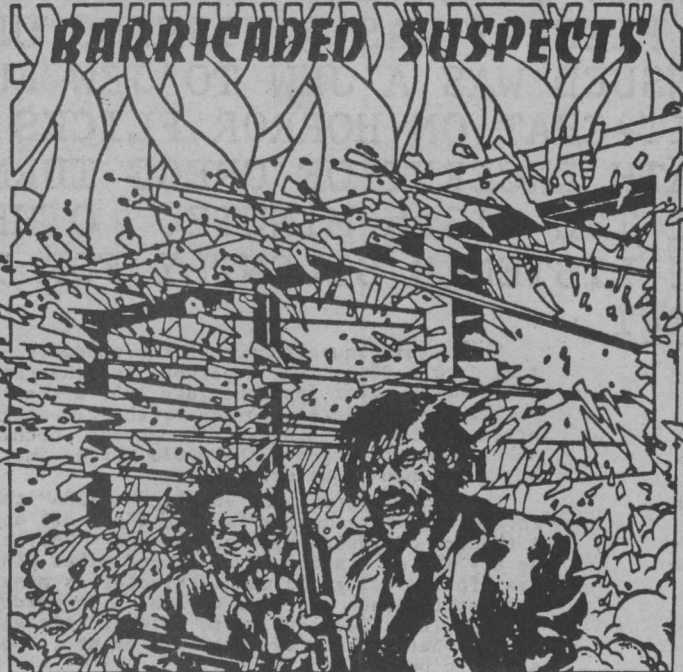
A: (Laughs) That's just the way it turned out. I mean we just went in there and just started blasting away. See the first album was very tame and structured. It was hardly as severe as the second record. It was done in a 24



At this point the tape pretty much ran out, however we kept talking about generic HC bands (how he likes to collect the records), what a bad dude Reagan is, Jello Biafra, how most Europeans perceive Americans (negatively), etc... Thurstan also talked a good deal about his association with Lydia Lunch. After her work with the Birthday Party she was in a band with Thurstan, Pat Place, and Jim Sclavunos for a couple months. They only played a couple gigs but did some recording which includes some of the Birthday Party material. Thurstan claims the recordings are great but Lydia's vocals need to be redone as they were only reference vocals. He observed that she kind of "leads people on in a way. She's got alot of power over people. She's very practised in the art of psychiatry but she has a sense of genius about her that I admire." Thurstan incidently also puts out a fanzine called Killer (84 Eldridge Street #5 New York, NY 10002) and I think it's obvious from the interview that he's as much of a fan of the music as anybody.

A Compilation Album Featuring:

BARRICADED SUSPECTS



plus fanzine

All this for only \$5 postpaid

ORDER DIRECT FROM:

TOXIC SHOCK

the people who brought you:

PEACE CORPSE
TOX-003 7" EP

"Life, Death & Quincy"

MODERN INDUSTRY

TOX-002 "Man in Black" EP

also: TOX-001
NOISE FROM NOWHERE

a Suburban Sampler with
MOSLEM BIRTH, KENT STATE
MANSON YOUTH and MODERN
INDUSTRY (red vinyl)

these 7" EP's are available
direct for \$3ea postpaid



**HUMAN
THERAPY**

also distributed
thru Toxic Shock
HUMAN THERAPY
4 song 7" EP

(wholesale available to stores)



MAIL ORDER



For over 3 years we have provided a complete mail-order service for fans of hardcore. Our catalog includes releases from such record labels as: AFFIRMATION, ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES, B.Y.O., C.I.A., CRASS, DISCHORD, FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH, NEW ALLIANCE, PLACEBO, NEW UNDERGROUND, POSH BOY, REFLEX, SMOKE 7, SST, SUBTERRANEAN, TOUCH and GO, SPIDERLEG, WASTELAND and countless other independents as well as loads of fanzines, t-shirts, (including authorized Pushead), stickers, badges and leather goods. Our mail-order catalog is available now. Send 50¢ to:

TOXIC SHOCK Records

BOX 242 POMONA CA 91769

(714) 865-2088

Independent labels and fanzines!
We buy direct from you! Contact
us with samples.

Premier issue of BRAINSTORM fanzine \$1p.p.