

## **Bands that Should Have Been Bigger**

### **Shoegaze**

#### **Drop Nineteens**

Drop Nineteens formed in Boston, Massachusetts in 1991. They were one of the few American Shoegaze bands while many others, such as My Bloody Valentine, were from the United Kingdom. Shoegaze was known for using fuzz distortion, dense reverb, delay, and washes of white noise to create a wide soundscape through the music. The term shoegazing comes from the heavy use of effect pedals and members of the band often looking down at their feet during concerts.

Drop Nineteens initially included vocalist and guitarist Greg Ackell, and drummer Chris Roof; the two were former classmates in high school. The band name came from Ackell's childhood apartment on the nineteenth floor, and his memory of literally dropping objects to the ground from that level. Drummer Chris Roof recruited Steve Zimmerman on bass, Paula Kelley on additional vocals and guitar, and Motohiro Yasue on guitar. Together, the musicians created a dynamic sound full of energy.

Many listeners compare the Ackell and Kelley vocal duo directly with Kevin Shields and Bilinda Butcher of My Bloody Valentine, but Drop Nineteens had their own unique spin on lyrics and vocal melodies. The band's sound also captures more of a relentless, raw aspect at times, mostly from Roof's drumming style, and Yasue's use of distortion pedals. From a mixing standpoint, there is often more low end in the sound, with the drums being very present and punchier than other well-known shoegaze recordings. This combination taps somewhat into the emerging grunge movement rising in the United States at the time. All of these aspects made the music popular on college radio, and caught the attention even more prominently of listeners in

the U.K. Drop Nineteens' music also appeared in Nickelodeon's *The Adventures of Pete and Pete*, popular in the early 90s.

Drop Nineteens put out two full-length albums and several EPs during their short tenure. Their debut album, *Delaware*, released on June 19, 1992, earned positive acclaim from music critics in the United States and England. The album release peaked at number 5 in the U.K. Independent Albums that year. Delaware's lead single and most popular song, "Winona," helped the album gain some more traction. After several band member changes, Drop Nineteens released a follow-up album, *National Coma*, on January 1, 1993. Megan Gilbert replaced Paula Kelley, Pete Koeplin replaced Chris Roof, and Justin Crosby replaced Motohiro Yasue. In 1995, Drop Nineteens announced that they would be disbanding and going their separate ways. Even with the band's dissolution, they left a cult following in the shoegaze genre.

Fast forward to 2022: Drop Nineteens announced they were getting back together celebrating the 20 year release of Delaware. Now in 2023, the band is working on a third studio album. With an altered lineup of Ackell, Koeplin, Yasue, and Kelley. Drop Nineteens may have gone on hiatus for nearly 25 years, but the return of their music is promising. Through their two dynamic albums, the band put themselves at the forefront of the shoegaze scene and created a sound that still captivates fans around the world. Drop Nineteens are one of the few examples of American Shoegaze, and a band that broke through the traditional boundaries to create a unique sound all their own. It will be exciting to see how their return impacts their overall legacy as a band.

## **The Curtain Society**

The Curtain Society was part of the rising tide of shoegaze music growing out of the indie rock subculture in the early 1990s. Bands like Slowdive and My Bloody Valentine were

gaining attention from fans and critics, and The Curtain Society fit in with this wave of popularity. Similar to Drop Nineteens, The Curtain Society was a Shoegaze band formed in Southbridge, Massachusetts in 1988. Despite performing and songwriting since their formation, they have remained more in the background of the indie music scene. Fans of The Curtain Society often wonder why the band never got bigger than they are. They fused together elements of alternative rock and dream pop to channel the shoegaze sound but had their own take on the genre. The band has been consistently on the scene for over three decades, and yet never drew widespread acclaim.

The Curtain Society consists of singer and guitarist Roger Lavalée, bassist Ron Mominee, and drummer Duncan Arsenault. Drummer and multi-instrumentalist Duncan Arsenault is also known for playing in The Curtis Mayflower and Big Eyed Rabbit, among other groups. His participation in The Curtain Society adds additional depth to their sound. The band has remained true to its core sound over the years, exploring a wide dynamic range and experimenting with a variety of recording techniques. At the start of their career, Lavalée released several cassettes and EPs and from his own label, Apostrophe Records, before the group signed to Bedazzled Records in Washington D.C.

The three band members often use different effects on their instruments, never straying from their shoegaze roots. The vocals are aetherial and often filled out with spacious reverb. The overall sound of the band uses ambient textures to offset the fuzz distortion of the guitars, and the use of stereo panning creates a wider sense of space. They have crafted a unique blend of sounds not found in other bands. Another aspect that sets The Curtain Society apart is their use of harmony, often using less common chord changes and chord extensions such as 7th and 9ths.

At times, this makes the music more dissonant, but other times, it adds to the dream-like textures in the music.

Possible reasons why The Curtain Society have not become more well-known is due to their lack of promotion or backing by a major label. While the band did complete multiple tours during the earlier days of their career, they have not been as present as online options became more popular. There have also been long spans of time without any new material. Given the accessibility of streaming services and the band's digital presence, band members could likely reach out to a broader and younger audience to continue to grow their fan base. While the band does see passionate, loyal fans at shows and on streaming platforms, they remain mostly an underground band.

The Curtain Society, along with other shoegaze bands, were also overshadowed by the emergence of the grunge movement in the early 90s. Nirvana, Alice In Chains, and Soundgarden all released their seminal records within a year of The Curtain Society's formation. After grunge came a long span of other shifting music movements. The Curtain Society has the benefit of maintaining a live presence since their formation; now could be the perfect time for The Curtain Society to get some deserved recognition.

Another factor that has likely limited the visibility of The Curtain Society is that their sound is somewhat polarizing and does not easily fit into any one genre. Shoegaze music in general is more obscure and less mainstream, meaning that the music may not be deeply embraced by general listeners. This can also be a positive however as it gives The Curtain Society unique character.

The Curtain Society has long been a cult favorite among alternative and shoegaze music fans. They have had an impressive and unusual run since they appeared on the music scene. With

an ever-evolving and distinctly unique sound, blending elements of alternative rock, dream pop, and even psychedelia, it is surprising they have not gained more traction. However, The Curtain Society's discography and the die-hard fans they have cultivated over the past three decades remain a testament to why they can still be called the originators of a style and sound that other bands are tapping into today. The band's sound was heavily influential in the shoegaze subgenre.

## **Grunge**

### **Local H**

Local H first appeared on the scene in 1990, hailing from Zion, Illinois. Many listeners might recognize their 1996 song "Bound for the Floor," but many other songs did not gain as much traction. With over thirty years, one might wonder why Local H is not more well-known. For those unfamiliar, Local H is a grunge-rock band. Original members include guitarist and vocalist Scott Lucas, drummer Joe Daniels, and previous lead guitarist John Sparkman. Sparkman left the band in 1991, shortly after the band's inception, leaving Lucas and Daniels playing with just the two of them. Think if Nirvana fused with the White Stripes.

Lucas and Daniels collaborated to create a full sound, despite only having two people, usually balancing songs between a softer and more mellow side with a louder and more aggressive sound. Studio recordings helped as Lucas could record multiple takes and play different instruments, but when playing live, he would usually sing and play guitar. Lucas would also use guitar effect pedals to change the sound as needed live while Daniels covered percussion. Lucas typically wrote lyrics, singing (or shouting) about his unique perspective on the world. Lyrics were sometimes cynical, sometimes humorous, but always thought provoking.

Local H drew a great deal of influence from alternative rock from the time, often using cleaner, softer verses to offset the louder, more distorted choruses.

Local H was signed to a major label, Island Records, in 1994. They released their first album, *Ham Fisted*, in 1995. That album was followed by *As Good As Dead* in 1996, which featured their popular song, “Bound for the Floor.” After that came *Pack Up The Cats* in 1998, which did well on the charts but did not sell well. Following the release, Daniels left the band and was replaced with Brian St. Clair. The first release with St. Claire was *Here Comes the Zoo* in 2002 on a new label, Palm Pictures. On the label and with St. Claire, Local H released three more albums. In 2013, Ryan Harding replaced St. Claire, making him the third drummer in the two piece band. Over the past ten years, they have released another two albums, most recently *Lifers* in 2020, produced by Andy Gerber on the AntiFragile Music Label. The album includes a cover of *We Are The Road Crew*, originally by Motorhead. Local H has recorded other covers in their own style such as “Time” by Pink Floyd and “When Doves Cry” by Prince.

Local H has stood the test of time. While they have not always been commercially successful or present in mainstream music, they have spanned over three decades of shows, recordings, and lineup changes. Their music is worth checking out and the talent behind the music is inevitable.

## **Malfunkshun**

Many know Seattle, Washington as the birthplace of grunge music, but not as many know about Malfunkshun, a band that helped pave the way for the genre. Malfunkshun was formed in 1980, right around a long run of glam metal. While one might hear some early recordings as glam metal, others might hear elements of punk; the various components that make up Malfunkshun actually worked as a bridge between glam to grunge. You might compare

Malfunkshun to grunge the same way you would compare Black Sabbath to heavy metal. When the band started, they were not intending to invent a new genre, but it happened organically, allowing bands like Nirvana to thrive in the same city. Many fans wonder why Malfunkshun never got the recognition and exposure they deserved.

Malfunkshun came to be through two brothers, Andy Wood (lead vocals) and Kevin Wood (guitar). The brothers joined David Hunt on drums and Dave Rees on bass to create the first version of Malfunkshun. Both abruptly left the band (Dave Rees notoriously after playing one show). Regan Hager took over drums, Kevin switched to bass, and Andrew did both vocals and guitar, forming a trio. Through their songwriting and melding of different genre elements, the band helped advance the Seattle underground music scene.

During their live shows in the 80s, each band member famously took on a different alter-ego, in a similar fashion of KISS; the trio was L'Andrew the Love Child, Kevinstein, and Thundarr (Hager). Their shows were high energy, as were many shows of the era. Andy could be somewhat unpredictable and would sometimes walk out into the audience to eat cereal or throw pieces at the audience. Unfortunately, he also got into drugs, eventually entering rehab, and putting the band on hold.

After coming back out of rehab, the band continued shows, but records show they rarely headlined even as they were becoming more popular locally. They did not follow trends of Sub Pop which were taking form. Andy tragically died in 1990 from a heroin overdose, a moment that the Seattle music scene felt deeply. Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic of Nirvana spoke fondly of Malfunkshun shows and Andy's performances during interviews.

In 2006, Kevin Wood started the band back up again, returning to playing guitar; after a few lineup changes, the band continues today with Jeff Stark on vocals, Bradley Leach on drums,

and Paul Lamb on bass guitar and synth. The group released an EP in 2021 titled *Flow* through Wammybox Records and fans are looking forward to seeing what comes next.

## **East Coast Hip Hop (Brooklyn, NY)**

### **Arsonists**

Arsonists is an underground hip hop crew based in Brooklyn, New York, who has been performing together since 1993. Though they have been around for a long time and have a cult following amongst certain circles, they don't get nearly as much recognition as they deserve. This article will explore who they are, the type of music they make, their influence on the culture, and their group background.

The group is composed of three main members: Mister Sinister, Swel Boogie, and Jise One. In addition, the group has recruited various musicians and producers throughout their career, most notably the legendary producer DJ Premier. Although the group was originally composed of mostly East Coast hip hop, they have since expanded their styles, incorporating sounds from various genres including Latin and house.

The music of Arsonists is characterized by a blend of hardcore beats, aggressive rapping, and conscious topics. Common themes that appear in their songs include police brutality, racism, and social injustice. The lyrics often focus on delivering a message of empowerment to the listener. One of their most famous songs "Bomb Throwing" provides a clear example of their willingness to fight against oppression and their commitment to making sure the listener is left with hope.

As far as their influence on hip hop, Arsonists have been at the forefront of the underground rap scene since their formation. The group has been credited with contributing to



the rise of other underground hip hop acts and has helped set the tone for the genre. The intense beats and provocative lyrics provided by the group have been influential to many other groups and have incorporated diverse sounds from various genres into their music.

In addition to their musical accomplishments, Arsonists also stayed up to date with technology trends. In 2000, the group released *What A Burn*, an album that was distributed exclusively through their website and available for download. This allowed their music to reach a wider audience and was a big step parallel with the advancement of streaming technology.

Despite their longevity and influence, Arsonists remain largely unknown to mainstream audiences. Thanks to their uncompromising worldview and determined commitment to their genre, the group continues to perform regularly and plan to release new music, even after 30 years.

### **Boot Camp Klik**

Boot Camp Klik is an underground hip hop group from Brooklyn, New York who has been around since 1992. Boot Camp Klik is actually a collective of artists from four separate Brooklyn hip hop groups: Buckshot, O.G.C. (Louieville Sluggah, Starang Wondah, and Top Dog), Smif-N-Wesson (Tek and Steele), and Heltah Skeltah (Sean Price who died in his sleep in 2015). Following the death of Sean Price, Boot Camp Klik has not released any new music, but the remaining group members are still active. It is shocking to discover how much background goes along with Boot Camp Klik, and why they were not bigger.

In 1997, Boot Camp Klik released their first full length studio album. Previously, Boot Camp Klik also collaborated with hip hop duo Da Beatminerz, also of Brooklyn, NY. Their samples appear on *Nocturnal* and *Da Storm*. Following these releases, Boot Camp Klik's album *For The People* uses live instrumentation which did not receive as positive of reviews. The

thought of using live instruments and changing the sound may have been detrimental to the commercial success, but it also showed proactive risks Boot Camp Clik was willing to take for their music. Perhaps if the album was released today, it would go over better with fans, as current trends show live recorded instruments on studio releases and at live performances.

Boot Camp Clik's sound is the sum of all its parts; mixing elements of Commercial Hip Hop, Boom Bap and East Coast rap, the group coined their own unique style. Having some of the hardest flow in the East Coast hip hop scene at the time, members focused on delivering captivating lyricism, still resonating today. Tracks like “Headz Ain’t Ready” offer a narrative about the bitterness that can set in when success for an artist is short-lived. With an essence of positivity, “Raw Dope Flow” adds an element of ruggedness to the group's delivery with gritty rhymes, resonating with deep reflection.

The group was limited to underground success because of the lack of mainstream promotion and availability. With each respective album, a different member of the collective would be the primary artist on the release. This was a huge element of the chemistry in the offerings of each artist, as well as the unity in the collective. They never tried to overshadow any of the members, rather create one sound that all members share and own.

The Sound of Boot Camp Clik is recognized for its uniqueness and underground street knowledge. The members of the group bring their individual sounds and stories into one packet of hard- hitting rhymes and production. The group has only had a few members, with Sean Price as the leader. The rest of the collective stayed consistent since 1995. As a whole, they carry the raw street essence that no other Hip Hop group of their time rivaled.

After Sean Price died in 2015, the group has not come out with new music, but Boot Camp Clik is still a classic within the hip hop landscape. They have paved the way for modern

day underground hip hop in Brooklyn and beyond, providing fans with classics that still resonate today. As a whole, the collective stands strong and still brings the essence of underground hip hop to the surface with their gritty, street-driven sound. Boot Camp Clik is considered by some to be one of the most influential Hip Hop groups in modern times, due to their groundbreaking sound and ability to stay consistent in an ever-changing industry. It is impossible to deny their influence on the culture.