

# Is grunge dead?

MONTREAL (CUP)--

by James-Jason Lee and Stephen Smegelski

In last November's *Vogue* fashion section, Nirvana members posed in a designer denim fashion spread. A recent issue of *Mademoiselle* features a cover declaring this spring's "tough and sweet" grunge look.

Everyone is looking for the next Seattle. Is this true grunge? Is there true grunge? "I think it is in some sense made up," says Adam Silverman, publicist for the Sub-Pop record label in Seattle. Sub-Pop has been credited as having single-handedly given birth to grunge.

"It's not too much different from the similar scenes that happened in Athens, Georgia and Minneapolis, Minnesota," explains Silverman. "With Nirvana, things became a lot bigger a lot quicker."

No kidding. Within a year, 'grunge' has become the music industry's favourite buzzword. The term loosely refers to a sound best described as 70's hard rock with a punk attitude. Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath are cited as major influences of young grunge bands.

In terms of visual style, flannel shirts and long unwashed hair are the distinguishing trademarks. In terms of attitude, it's basically, "I don't care, I just wanna party!"

But the musical trappings associated with grunge are not particular to the 90s. Looking past grunge's clothes and fashionable level of uncleanness, the music offers unexpected chord changes and pop without a key or a clue.

The music has a relationship to the scary Stravinsky and Charlie Parker. Both artists challenged and

reinvented their musical forms with biting attacks and dissonance, like so-called grunge musicians.

So grunge is a made-up style, who are its makers?

"This stuff started out about four-and-a-half years ago," says Silverman. "A local label put out a lot of stuff. It became a very marketed sound. The label itself created the sound. Nirvana do not sound like Mudhoney who do not sound like Tad."

According to Andrew Smith, entertainment editor for *The Daily* at the University of Washington, "People are pissed off. Grunge began as a joke. All those bands like Mudhoney and Nirvana started off as jokes."

The joke was taken seriously and received the backing of serious media attention and, more importantly, serious money.

Its marketability has translated into grunge movies (Cameron Crowe's *Singles*) and fashion (Marc Jacob's Perry Ellis spring collection).

In one deft marketing move, alternative culture was once more denied by the mainstream. The counterculture has been

sanitized and made not only the acceptable but stylish -- e.g. Kurt Cobain's well-publicized heroin addiction.

We are witnessing the recuperation and exoneration of Disney Grunge. One can hear the bells of distortion tolling the death knoll.

When asked if grunge is dead, Smith was ambivalent.

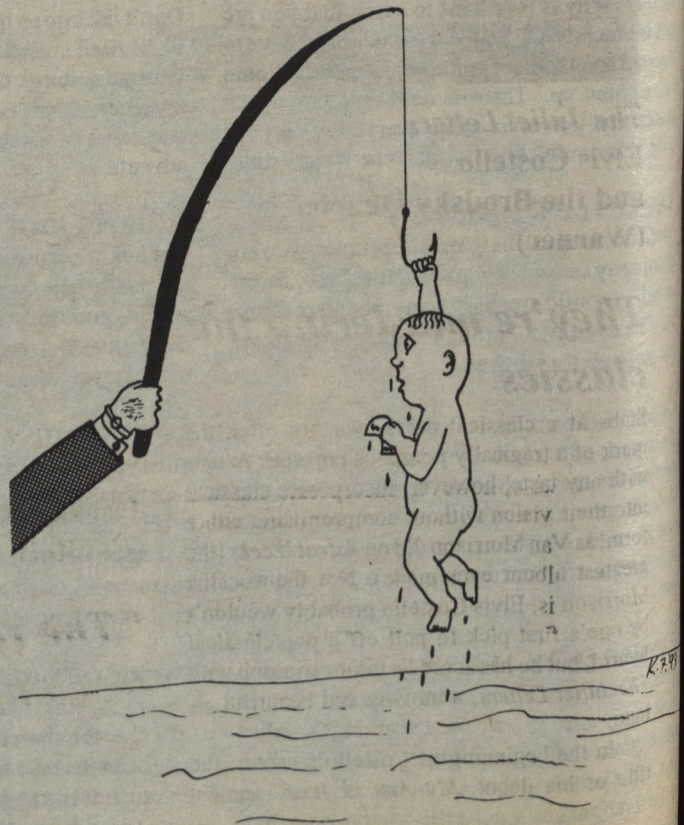
"That's a good question," he says. "Just this week there was a lot of filming going on dealing with the grunge scene. People are sort of surprised. Ask a lot of people and they'd say grunge is dead. Ask Sub-Pop. It's all MTV these days." Smith feels the industry-created 'grunge scene' is having a negative effect on smaller bands.

"A lot of the little bands are dying because of the majors," he asserted. "People are moving here to get signed. It's like what happened in Manchester. All the big clubs, like Candy, charge bands to play. If label scouts are out there, bands will pay. That's not how it was when it began."

The trappings of grunge are not limited to Seattle, though.

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Up from the underground and onto the top of the charts, grunge has been assimilated.



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