

Everyone is Going to Hate What's to Come

Running is not my thing. It's something I'm possessed to do to stay in shape. You have leukemia when you're young, you eat nothing but tasteless foods and sweets and play no sports, and then you have to shed it. Unfortunately for me, this was the last two years of college (out of five).

The thing about running — or jogging, really — was that it ached like a sharp knife down my right side, like someone shanked me right in my appendix only a few yards from a mile run. I've always had this problem. It probably means I'm just way out of shape, but I was hoping to eventually get past it.

When I was in college, I usually worked out with a playlist consisting of a “rough and tough” mix. But one night, I changed my running path, from the University's gym to around my apartment complex and then to the levee just off of campus. After the run, I was proud of my distance, but frustrated by the sharp pain in my side that still I couldn't shake. That feeling was holding me back. I was angry with myself and frustrated with losing more weight faster by going further. I had a hard time fighting through the pain. I wanted to change something drastic about myself. I wanted to prove something different, both internally and externally, by attempting to run a greater distance.

I longed for the shape of things to eventually overcome. It was a small goal and a challenge. With each month tied into strands of years, the challenge was set daily for a new goal. You look around for not only a difference in societal norms, but also a revolution within yourself.

In high school, MTV had this affiliate channel for a while. I received it when my house got a cable box: those satellite looking receivers that gave you more channels than you'd ever even blink twice at, and ten years ago, it blew our minds. Along with this magical digital cable box, I got MTV2, this promise-of-a-channel from MTV that guaranteed music 24/7. Until I hit my freshman year of college, that promise wasn't a lie. Only a channel up from MTV2 was MTVX— all rock, all the

time. Old videos. New videos. Videos not on MTV or MTV2's rotation. It ruled my life for a good two years. I would watch Bad Religion's music video for "Atomic Garden" and Ozzy Osbourne's one for "Crazy Train." I mean, fuck, they *loved* playing that video.

One day, while lounging around the house (I guess I could have been running, right?), this video with a vibrant string of an opener appeared. Men wearing bunny costumes ran down a hallway. Then men dressed in white hazmat suits, looking like extras on Marilyn Manson's *Mechanical Animals* tour, were now running down this pipeline hallway. Then the drums kicked in. And the guitar riff built, and built, and built...

"Can I scream?!"

An explosion triggered, and for the next five minutes, I was hooked. Not on the song's political undertones, but that one chest heavy riff. It was the video for Refused's only single from the *The Shape of Punk to Come*. "New Noise" was a little thrash meets a lot of metal guitars meets some sort of electronic trance that kept building itself up to detonate over and over again, until vocalist Dennis Lyxzén belts out everything he has left in his system, declaring "THE NEW BEAT! THE NEW BEAT! THE NEW BEAT!" over and over. Then he simply throws down his microphone in true Chris Rock fashion at the end of the band's loudest and boldest statement to date.

Thanks, Crazy Town.

There's something about the "New Noise" video I've picked apart over the years. Though it is only a theory and hasn't been proven in any interview I can track down, each set of characters in the video represents, to me, what *The Shape of Punk to Come* incorporated, and what it unintentionally set up to build into just another counterculture of marketing.

First, there's the bunny suits. This is the playful innocence of a new sound. The idea that rock and roll is fun and exciting. When the band tears down the costumes to reveal their true selves, this shows that there is a serious side to the music. In the case of Refused, this means Lyxzén's stark political and social lyrics. The second costume, the Halloween masks, represents the utter terror of sound.

These characters are the show. The flinging guitar swings, the louder than necessary bass amp and the chaotic screams. Like the punk artists before them, vocals in punk were never about melody, but the message. With the exception of bands like The Clash, The Replacements and Patti Smith, having a good voice was always second to your ultimate document of lyrics. Throughout the thirteen tracks of *The Shape of Punk to Come*, Lyxxén takes that message without melodic quality, and puts it through a bullhorn.

The third character (not including the band themselves playing live) is the most important: the white-masked hazmat suits. I wouldn't say that this character represents the clean cut of recording, which according to drummer David Sandström was, "what stands out about the record," but of the lack of individuality that is to come later. It comes because of the record, and even the allusions brought up from the imagery, sound and title of *The Shape of Punk to Come* – which has caused the band to be shunned by some fans of the hardcore genre.

Evident by the counterculture of the early millennium that sprung up because of Internet and digital saturation, *The Shape of Punk to Come* is not only a staple of the sound that is to come in the next ten years, it's also a motif of an industry soaked in suburban, whining garage bands that build upon nothing new. It's the same bands regurgitating the same style musically and fashionably in droves. Whether it was the explosion of nu-metal or how hardcore's fourth and fifth waves shaped themselves into bastardized metalcore bands that would evolve backwards by the end of the new decade of the millennium, *The Shape of Punk to Come* is the beginning of something grand.

It's also somewhat the end of it. Just as punk itself spurted up into a wholesale and died in just a few years, only to give birth to post-punk, heavier hardcore and radio hits bought and sold through the new wave radio, opposite the no-wave underground.

In the 2007 DVD, *Refused Are Fucking Dead*, the narrator, presumed to be one of the attendees of the band's final show in Harrisonburg, VA, says something that hits the nail on the head of what can be said now about any punk subgenre, and even

the punk attitude when it began: “Sometimes punk rock is beautiful. It’s a reflection of what life should be, and sometime’s it’s just a stupid clique for adolescence.”

Now this quote may sum up why the Sex Pistol’s lead man John Lydon ditched the “Rotten” and formed Public Image Ltd., or why the punk scene died and the post-punk scene emerged, and those adolescent artists grew up and discovered *how to play* their instruments.¹ Adolescence seems to be the hardest time for most: befriending others, finding identity, and for many, overcoming self-conscious behaviors. What happens when we work through these times (the toughest in high school, usually carrying over in the first few semesters of college, revisited again when you graduate and are still scratching your head smirking, “What the fuck now?”) is that we latch onto something accepting— a clique, if you will. Cliques can include fashion, vernacular and swagger. But what is taken for granted is the marketing of any said clique or “scene” through conscious or sub-conscious buy-ins.

This brings us back to the hazmat characters in the Refused video. The characters are completely identical; completely clean; completely conformed. I look at those characters Refused showcased in that video, knowingly or not, as a foreshadowing to the conformity that existed in the years to follow within the underground scene of forward thinking. We would get our *Relationship of Command*, *We Are the Romans*, *Worship and Tribute* and many others though. The records that mattered I can count on both hands.

“Refused existed between the years 1991 and 1998. During this period of time they performed more than 400 shows in Europe and America. Their last performance took place in Harrisonburg, Virginia.”

This is how the band’s documentary opens. An overdub from the band members converse back and forth about the final show is as follows: “I felt like people were projecting whatever they wanted on us, and they had taken over everything...The band eventually became an entity that couldn’t be stopped...What

¹ I must take a sidetrack and theorize that there’s a reverse to this idea: Weezer. I think the band, and mainly songwriter Rivers Cuomo, has written some of his best records as a kid as opposed to a grown man. Sorry if this offends you Mr. Cuomo, but I think many would agree. Some bands’ key has been adolescence and innocence.

we became was not what we had in mind when we started out...The mentality was life or death. It wasn't a very friendly, inclusive, warm atmosphere. It was more like this, 'If you can't handle the pressure, then leave.'"

The last statement by vocalist Dennis Lyxzén is the most important in understanding the construction of *The Shape of Punk to Come*. Within the confines of the album, there lies the infighting of a band, all four members with different approaches. In an oddly chemical fashion², the approaches to music each member took intersected. In an essay, "A Scrutiny of Their Motives," included in the liner notes of the record, Patrick T. Daly, a friend of the band who was asked to personally write the piece for the record's insert, opens up an insight in the recording of the album and an overall meaning of its work. Something not heard, but makes obvious sense.

He writes, "To me this album is a reflection of tensions that exist within the band, or more to the point, most bands. These tensions are caused, in part, by diverging ideas, interests, and directions and, in part, by the obligations and responsibilities which being in a band dictate. There are multiple creative elements in a band which all contribute their part towards the creation of the whole."

The above statement is simple: the idea of the album was to exonerate tension through art. Like tapping a pencil out of frustration, one might come up with a beat after awhile. That's where the band bridges from their second album, *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent*, into their heralded opus. Where *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent* seemed like a simple lashing and rebranding of hardcore mentality and frustration which the band took influence from, *Shape* was its predecessor's smarter older brother, seeing more of the world and harboring more baggage in different outlets than his adolescent sibling.

But for Sandström, *Songs...* isn't anything to scoff at. "There's nothing simple about [that album], the arrangements of the songs are much more complex than anything off of *The Shape of Punk to Come*. *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent* is, I

² A Chimerical Bombation In 12 Bursts

think, a better record in some senses, a lot less excess, tighter, harder, better lyrics and a lot less pretentious,” he says.

Daly continues in his manifesto, “Their past is given continued meaning through their progression and building upon it. Also, there are few things worse than mocking music that you love and the musicians who created by playing ‘down’ to that music. A large part of what makes some bands so great is not just rooted in the actual music, ideas, or the fact that they ‘were the first to do it.’ Rather, it is that they were giving their best effort and playing at the edge of their abilities at all times. If a band ever finds that it is not doing both of those things then they are not playing the kind of music that they should be playing. There is no better tribute to a creative influence than being creative. For a band to satisfy themselves as a collective, the trajectory of growth and change has to be acceptable to all. However, it must be kept in mind that ‘acceptable’ is often inherently a compromise and thus, laced with internal tensions.”

So goes the title of the record. Sandström says that the idea stemmed from an Ornette Coleman record that he was very fond of, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. Sandström, though deeply rooted into heavier music, was very much into jazz at the time. Along with guitarist Jon Brännström’s musical direction into dance, electro and hip-hop, the album began to take shape as a piece of progression and compromise. Sandström also says that he, Brännström, and guitarist Kristofer Steen were all drummers in former bands, which contributed to the unique way of writing the music. They would just jam and create riffs and drum parts “until something sounded good.”

“We would get into the nitty gritty of the rhythms and figure out what would work.” This is where Sandström says the *worship* and *influence* of his band’s record lacks in contemporary music. “The bands that usually talk about that record are bands that sound like the groove is surgically removed from their [own] records. The studio where we recorded, there are bands that come there every year from Mexico and America and all over, to record. Some labels pay them to be there, just because *The Shape of Punk to Come* was recorded there. Those bands that record, I don't understand the connection.”

Besides the influence of American hardcore found in Refused's work, there's something even more profound and overlooked in how *The Shape of Punk to Come* came together socially. While the lyrics that make up the record come off as heavily political, there's a social double entendre that holds water both in the album's aggressive inception and place in musical history that grew out of competition and not just allusion.

"A record like that is never just a product, or any record that's made, is rarely a product of just one person or four persons," Sandström says. A close-knit group of people - around 14 to 15 according to the drummer - made up a close personal scene of ideology that challenged and enlightened the members of Refused, and their surrounding music scene in Sweden. "We hung out and we would read the same books, and love the same music," he says. "It was like a really tight circle of friends, and within that we developed all these ideas, like political things, and would figure out new ideas and spread them within the group and discuss.

"We were a band that had all these people around us, who were very creative and smart and crazy funny people. I think we were sort of competing with each other and trying to make the most radical statement. That was part of the motivation. We grew up with hardcore punk. We were hardcore kids. We had been playing hardcore punk for years. At some point we ran out of ways to do it, we ran out of ideas, and that's when people started changing stuff up, and we were very creative when it came to reimagining the specific stylistic peculiarities of the American hardcore punk history."

The idea of creating music, Sandström says, was examining how certain rhythms were effective and explosive. Could Refused do a hardcore song that had a jazz break in the middle? Could they have a song that was really heavy and violent, but also had a violin intro? "It was a game in that sense, like to try and just do it."

The ideas of the "scene" that revolved around Refused is ironic to what the 15-24 year old market of Hot Topic and all-age shows call a "scene" now. Instead of building upon existing ideas and challenging the status quo, *The Shape of Punk to Come* has become a status quo filled with tight jeans, screaming frontmen

and flailing guitars. What was an identity more than a decade ago has become a highly consumed market of people in *identical hazmat suits*.

On the *Refused Are Fucking Dead* DVD, vocalist Dennis Lyxzén comments on the growing success of his band pre-*Shape*, “It felt like there was a sense of purpose behind everything. At first there was only us, but after awhile more people became interested in what we were doing. We went from playing shows in front of 50 people to playing shows in front of 600 people. We sort of created a world of our own, a sect that encompassed people and cultural references. We became a gang with a strong sense of identity that felt like, ‘We are a group of people that are strong and against the world.’”

Lyxzén also says that the first three shows were catastrophic following the release of *The Shape of Punk to Come*. While Refused broke up before the initial success of the record, time only tells the effect. When Sandström and I originally had this conversation some years back, he hadn’t been back to America since Refused’s split in 1998³. Lyxzén’s band post-Refused, The (International) Noise Conspiracy, later toured consistently across the United States, and time only brought upon annoyance. Plagued by Refused fans constantly asking about the former band’s seminal record, the band began to post signs at the Conspiracy’s merch table stating: “Please Do Not Ask About the Shape of Punk to Come.”

“I can see how annoying it can be,” Sandström says. “When I was a kid, I was annoyed with people that had done great stuff in the past, and the record was from said artists in ‘73, and they were coming to town with different music. Now I can understand how it feels.”

Following Refused’s break-up, Lyxzén released a final communiqué entitled “Refused are Fucking Dead” to all the press stating that the band would not be doing any interviews and demanding them to also burn any pictures they may have had of the band.

Sandström says it worked. When the band returned home, there was no contact with the media. In the communiqué, Lyxzén stated: “It is impossible to take

³ Refused reunited in 2012 to perform festival shows, and small International and U.S. runs.

part of a revolutionary program when every aspect of existence has to be projected as entertainment and music, a tradition that both in expression and creation has been dead for far too long.

“We were hoping that we could be the final nail in the coffin of the rotten cadaver that was popular music, but unfortunately the reification was too big for us to succeed with our feeble attempts to detour this boring discourse. When every expression, no matter how radical it is, can be transformed into a commodity and be bought or sold like cheap soda, how is it then possible that you are going to be able to take ‘art’ seriously?”

Unbeknown to Refused, the band’s idea of tinkering with an already existing genre of music as a game amongst friends would spring a decade of inventive bands that would drain into an overly saturated ditch.

“What we were doing, I can’t hear that in any of these records, these artists that name drop, with anything that they do,” Sandström says.

Putting together *The Shape of Punk to Come* was both a daunting task and a learning process that spawned a three-day mastering process and a record that is still talked about as “game changing” today, only growing in popularity with each generation.

“The whole production of the record was part of the writing,” Sandström says. The band usually just went in and “slammed down the tracks,” recording in under a week. “We were sort of getting intricate. What would this sound like if we did this or that in the studio? Every song had an idea. Certain guitar sounds. I used different drum sets for the sound of each song for the sounds we wanted to make.” On the naive end of the creative spectrum, Sandström admits that they were, “just fooling around.”

“We didn’t know what we were doing,” he laughs. “We were just being creative in the studio. We were thinking, ‘Let’s try this. Let’s try this pedal, turn this knob.’ The people in the studio were really confident, and we would be like, ‘No, this should be more distorted,’ and they would just work like crazy to try and please us with our ideas. The key element of the record is that we actually didn’t know what

we were doing, sort of making it up as we went along, thinking, 'Yeah, this should work.' We had no reason to think it would work. We assumed it would work. The label was spending a lot of money, and we were just fooling around.

"Towards the end of it, we had to work like hell to get it together," he adds. "Just the mastering took three days. We worked very hard with the mixing and the mastering with the ideas we had." Sandström says putting together a record like *The Shape of Punk to Come* would have been easier a decade later with modern recording software. Instead, the band used five ADATs linked in a row, an old school four track and a room full of reel-to-reels all hooked up to primitive recording software compared to studios today. The band mixed the record live, muting and turning knobs appropriately as it was mixed down. Sandström also says that he had to lay the click tracks in sections, having to count measures of the other instruments in his head referencing the click tracks. "The fact that it was so much hard work, made us focused and we could get it done."

He says that one of the things that make the album special is the, "stuff on that record that is odd, it doesn't take the turns you would expect. The course that is going to happen doesn't happen on that record."

From the beginning, Refused was built upon what their "scene" called "new school" or "new school hardcore," Sandström remembers. The new school influenced everyone from Victory Records to bands like Cro-Mags, Youth of Today, Sick of it All and Madball. He says the first show Refused ever played consisted of four covers off of the Gorilla Biscuits' first self-titled 7" record. The difference in the "new school" is that he considered "hardcore" to be the bands that existed between 1980-84, like Black Flag, which he, Lyxzén, and Steen are still very much into today.

Still after all the artistic progression and tinkering the band put themselves through, the legacy of *The Shape of Punk to Come*, and its place in hardcore's history books, happened too late. Without the advent of the online market and the "sharing" culture we live in today, the special spark burned out.

"Money started coming in the mail, and we were a band that didn't exist anymore, sort of like a punk pension fund. It was fucking strange," drummer David Sandström says.

The Shape of Punk to Come begins with a spoken word introduction, sounding like the speaker is on a soapbox in the middle of a busy downtown area: "They told me the classics never go out of style. They do. They do. Somehow baby, I never thought that we would too." Followed by white noise and building feedback, the record explodes with Lyxzén deftly screaming, "I've got a bone to pick with Capitalism, and a few to break!" on "Worms of the Senses/Faculties of the Skull," a title referencing Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl."

On its surface, the opener seems nothing more than a political hardcore song. Deep down though, the guitar and drums swagger quickly with Lyxzén vocals. The song displays some heavy guitar work and electronic samples, a mere glimpse into what is to follow. The song's opening dialogue is also foreshadowed irony, pretty much stating to the public that whatever you get from this record is it the final communiqué.

The track ends into an electronic interlude that sounds like a '80s FM radio on the fritz, scanning the dial for something that speaks volumes. Then, a foreign, energetic voice rambles and in there we first hear about the "Refused party program."

"Liberation Frequency" opens with a light plea, easy on Lyxzén's vocal cords and Steen and Brännström's guitars: "It's coming through the air for all of us to hear. Could it be the sounds of liberation or just the image of detention? We want the airwaves back. We want the airwaves back. We don't just want airtime we want all the time, all of the time." If the listener still hasn't gotten the full understanding of the record's intentions, the band kicks into their heavier mode, "What frequency are you getting? Is it noise or sweet, sweet music? On what frequency will liberation be?"

The first two songs sum up two key points of the album's now cherished afterthought: the market the album unintentionally helped create and the time it took people to *get it*. The last section of "Liberation Frequency" belts out the chorus again vocally, but not instrumentally, making a statement that doesn't want to be overshadowed by background noise. It sounds like the band *almost wanted* the

listener to understand what they were getting into before getting any further into the album. Without an understanding of the first two songs, the rest of the record won't follow.

This is about policy. This is about change. This is about challenging the established system.

Where the first two songs are pretty straight in the heavy style of hardcore music, "Deadly Rhythm" is the first jazz footnote that Sandström combines with an already laid out path. From the beginning horn intro and jazz drumming, to the mid section's bass and drum rhythmic breakdown, this is where the album begins to take its oddest turns and ideas, even sampling Bo Diddley's "I'm a Man" drum pattern as a musical quotation to finish out the album – just much louder and more abrasive. Lyxzén also takes a spoken word break during the midsection, "Is it our duty to die for governments & for gods? Is it our privilege to slave for market & for industry? Is it our right to follow laws, set to scare and to oppress? Is it a gift to stay in line and will it take away the blame?"

I've often wondered if this is more insight into the straight-laced poetic nature of the album. Lyxzén's manifesto throughout questions both political and social policies, and while the album makes many a reference to Refused's hardcore background, there is plenty of reference to be linked to something of a new Harlem Renaissance movement within punk. In a way, *The Shape of Punk to Come* takes elements of a genre of punk, which is already blunt in its execution of ideas, and ends up reinventing it, and to some, perfecting what bands like Born Against and Nation of Ulysses tried to do. It's not that those bands didn't do it well, and they rightfully deserve their place in history, just as Rites of Spring begot Saetia begot Thursday. The case in which a band turns their reference points into something stronger is the fault line where elitists bring out their pitchforks and a new generation discovers something special.

Whatever the case for the above, "Summerholidays vs. Punkroutine" is a departure from the aggressively odd style set out by the first three tracks, and leaves us wondering where the songs came in during the writing process. The song carries a harmonious guitar vamp and a much simpler rhythmic style. It's a reminder

that punk is not a specific sound; it's a style and emotional architecture. It doesn't have to be overcomplicated to catch someone's attention to the marketplace of ideas that lie within, but sometimes a clean riff says, "less is more."

The song leads into "Bruitist Porne #5," possibly assembled by Brännström, a non-vocal piece consisting of 85 seconds of electronic noise, serving as an intro to the album's single "New Noise."

"Can I scream?" Lyxzén asks, demands and belts out in one of the most influential lines both in its audibility and meaning. Unsure of what the line truly meant (Lyxzén denied my interview request, telling Sandström to tell me "Hey" and wish me good luck with the book), the line's vernacular is truly *what is to come*. While casual consumers of music generally feel that *good* music is that which is "harmonic" and "pleasurable," the grander scheme of the major labels and dozens of reality competitions is more of "what is marketable." Metal and heavy guitars have been around with fans for years, but the idea of a screaming frontman, even in punk music as early as the late '70s and to the grindcore underground of today, generally will never be successful on a mass-marketable level.

The theory is this: Take any CD you like, and go to a crowded area and just play it on a stereo. Besides gauging the looks on people's faces for you actually pulling off the stunt, see if they're even more disgusted at the sound. Is it diminished or minor? Is it heavy? Are there unpleasant vocals? These things tend to clash with a mass market of casual listeners. What if that market took time, grew out of angst and reached kids who could recreate and play the same way— a "monkey see-monkey do" type of influential creation? What if the jocks who mocked you in high school now don tattoos and turn the practice of losing oneself on stage into nothing more than bastardized hardcore full of stage antics and a light show?

To me, at the age of sixteen, it didn't sound like Lyxzén was asking to be abrasive. He gave you no choice. It was like when Rob Tyner of the MC5 told his band and the world to "Kick out the jams motherfucker!" in 1969. Years later, there was another revolt. In the years to come thereafter, the gap of acceptable frustration and anger widened to a larger majority. Bands combining metal, mid-'90s emo and late '90s hardcore would sell out mid-sized clubs that Refused could barely fill when

touring on *The Shape of Punk to Come* in the states. Even the two to three years following, bands such as Botch, Coalesce, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Orchid and pg.99 still struggled. While some of that same style of music still can't be fashioned into a selling point for all, the market certainly shifted five years (even less) later from a disproportionate percentage of aggressive listeners opposite radio's more lulling waves. Many labels created a market for the heavy genre, leading to an explosion of Hot Topic culture and the Warped Tour main stages of today.

This takes us into "The Refused Party Program," which sounds like a target made for the backs of a new generation's enemy socially and politically in the Bush Jr. years to come, but musically, it foreshadowed a coming movement: "This is the pulse. This is the sound. This is the beat of a new generation. This is the movement. This is the rhythm. This is the noise of revolution. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Refused party programme!" In the manifesto that explains much of the lyrical meaning behind the record, it says, "The Refused party programme screams out not 1, not 2, not 3, not 4, not 5 but 6 opinions and 6 structures of change and 6 levels of liberation.

"All in all not mystical but direct and attractive and as we shout 'Yeah' you'll feel the same sensation best described by Tomas Paine: 'Let them call me rebel and welcome, I feel no concern from it; but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul...'"

With this I must ask, did we make a whore of this record? Did we take it in vein, latching onto any party system, therein simply accepting their said ideals, never questioning or rebuilding ideology to go with the changing times? Did we as consumers and artists alike take what was made for granted?

So many people accuse Refused of ripping off past generations, but between the years of 2004-2009, I began to hear nothing but bands ripping off bands ripping off bands. The records being put into my inbox at the college radio station I worked at were like stacks of wrapped cheese slices, maybe coming across a nice variation of Gouda once and again. When Lyxzén reads excerpts from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, it fits perfectly into Refused's statement with the album: "To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs and a little knowledge of

music,” he reads. Later in his own words, “It could be dangerous. Art as a real threat.”

I don’t mind when I can pull back catalogs out of a band’s sound. When there is more than one catalog, like a pile of history books. Music works in waves. For the wave of post-hardcore at its height, Refused’s *The Shape of Punk to Come* was the *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Heats Club Band*, the *London Calling*, the *Damaged* of its time. Great albums and bands came before it, but the band took a new course with what they already knew. Great albums came after it, because there was a feeling that anything was possible. Shitty music existed before, during and long after its presence. People hated the record when it was released; others indulged their senses in it. Years later, some people still think it’s overly hyped, others see it as a time when the images, hustle and online marketability of punk and hardcore didn’t exist.

“Refused Are Fuckin Dead” (a reference to “Born Against Are Fucking Dead”), revisits elements in the first half of the record. Angry guitar patterns against even angrier vocals get pushed to the front as some of Sandström’s best drumming is showcased on the record. The inclusion of more house music permeates through, the left to right stereo outro fashions another notch in the album’s fluid variation.

The title track drives a guitar riff into the ground while Lyxzén says, “Adolescent beats with a new thing to see, smashed guitars just like you’ve seen on TV, with burning speakers and flaming hair. We’ll have a riot right here.” The song possibly incites a “riot” of political undertones, but the more I’ve listened to the album through the years, it sounds like a call to arms to keep the creative flow alive, especially in the age of adolescence and discovery among young bands throughout their formative years as groups of individuals honing skills into ideas out of challenges set by the elders before them.

Again, as music works in cycles, sometimes contemporaries simply begot contemporaries. It’s always bothered me why that is. Is it the money? Is it the fame? Is it the simple acknowledgement from peers? How many times a decade do we feel like a specific genre or trend or style just jumped the shark, and then we’re left with a period where nothing happened?

The third song on the album, “Deadly Rhythm,” showcases the boldest reference point of jazz on the album: a freethinking style opposite classical structure. The second to last song, “Tannhäuser /Dérive,” takes punk into a symphonic setting. Tannhäuser was a German poet and also the influence of German composer Richard Wagner’s opera of the same name. Tannhäuser was a poet whose satirical writing on love made him a folk legend. A legend based on redemption from the norm. Dérive is a term that simply means “drifting.” With a quick search of the term on the Web, “One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.” Thanks to Google, this makes perfect sense. Now, let’s put the two together.

Many of the songs that make up the album crescendo and decrescendo back and forth, but “Tannhäuser /Dérive” really does stroll slowly, building an orchestral plight, both light and heavy, and I’m not too keen on dead poets, but it seems from what information I could find, Tannhäuser, both the poet and opera, is about longing for something (the legend:love::the record:musical progression) and then seeking redemption— which is what the band set out and achieved with this record. They gave it their all, but collapsed under it. As the song references Igor Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring,” in its final act, Refused also turn your music appreciation classes from college into something more vigorous.

Lyxzn belts out one last time before the song ends, “So where do we go from here? Just about anywhere. Disorientated but alive. Boredom won’t get me tonight. Let’s bring this city to life - to light - tonight. There is no destination, but with a goal in mind we can all be realistic and demand the impossible. Let’s bring this city to life - to light - tonight.” The line, “Boredom won’t get me tonight. Let’s bring this city to life- to light – tonight!” demands one last burnout and continues with a clincher of a line, “There is no destination, but with a goal in mind we can all be realistic and demand the impossible.” *That* is what sums up the ideas, the progression and the dark resonance of *The Shape of Punk to Come*. There was no destination, no goal but realistically the band created the impossible through their own demand to be better

musicians, even if they were falling apart as friends and a musical unit within its construction and short lived delivery thereafter.

The album ends with a long form outro, “The Apollo Program was a Hoax.” The song takes an acoustic scenic route while Lyxxén softly mutters a last statement, “Cause if we have the vision I know that we are able. Suck on my words for a while and choke on the truth of a million dead,” and, “Sabotage will set us free. Throw a rock in the machine.” Beyond whatever political and/or social message Lyxxén was aiming for in the document of lyrics that make up *The Shape of Punk to Come*, one line stands out which sums up the album’s impact on the decade to come:

The destruction of everything is the creation of something new.

Refused set out to construct one last document before their demise. Between infighting and a conflation of musical ideas, along with a harboring of political and social change within, the band helped create and cement a new thought and musical progression to the generation after the “new school” of hardcore that helped influence the band to begin with, or for the sake of this book, the meat of the post-hardcore scene no one really knew was taking shape. Refused deconstructed all their loves of music— jazz, hardcore, metal, classical, punk, house, hip-hop, techno— and reconstructed it back into its own genre. The irony of it all is that the genre took too long to catch for the band to receive initial credit, and then said credit, with the help of an online and in-house DIY recording ethic of “trying new ideas,” sprouted a saturated market more than a decade after the band built the floor work for it. They were accused of ripping off their forefathers, but many a great band and record followed suit from their own influence while many (read: a more marketable, watered down version) didn’t.

On “Tannhäuser /Dérive,” Lyxxén screams out, “So where do we go from here?” and one has to wonder how many bands in the fourth and fifth waves strived of my generation answered, “Just about anywhere.”