

= My War =

My War is the second studio album by American band Black Flag . It polarized fans on its release in 1984 on SST Records over the LP 's B @-@ side , on which the band slowed down to a heavy , Black Sabbath @-@ esque trudge , despite the reputation the band had earned as leaders in fast hardcore punk on its first album , Damaged ( 1981 ) .

After a period of legal troubles which prohibited the band from using its own name on recordings , Black Flag returned to the studio with a new approach to its music that incorporated a greater variety of styles , resulting in a sound orthodox punks found difficult to accept . The line @-@ up had shrunk from five members to three : vocalist Henry Rollins , drummer Bill Stevenson , and co @-@ founding guitarist Greg Ginn . Ginn doubled on bass guitar under the name " Dale Nixon " for the recording as he had pushed out co @-@ founding bassist Chuck Dukowski shortly before recording ; the album includes two tracks Dukowski wrote .

The six tracks on the A @-@ side of the LP are generally high @-@ paced , thrashy hardcore , featuring guitar solos unusual in punk . On the B @-@ side are three tracks in a sludge metal style , each breaching six @-@ minutes with ponderously slow tempos and unrelenting dark lyrics of self @-@ hatred . The band members had grown their hair long when they toured the album in 1984 , further alienating their hardcore skinhead fanbase . My War had a major influence on sludge metal and grunge .

= = Background = =

In 1978 Black Flag guitarist and cofounder Greg Ginn converted his ham radio business Solid State Transmitters to SST Records to release the band 's first EP Nervous Breakdown . Soon SST was releasing recordings by other bands as well , beginning with Minutemen 's Paranoid Time in 1980 .

Black Flag recorded its first album Damaged in 1981 at Unicorn Studios and arranged a deal with the studio 's record label Unicorn Records , which had distribution with MCA Records . MCA label president Al Bergamo halted the release after hearing the record , calling it " anti @-@ parent " ? though SST hand Joe Carducci asserts this was a pretense for MCA to sever relations with the financially troubled Unicorn . The band obtained and distributed the already @-@ pressed 20 @,@ 000 copies of Damaged and adorned it with a label displaying Bergamo 's " anti @-@ parent " quote . Legal troubles erupted when SST claimed unpaid royalties from Unicorn and Unicorn successfully counter @-@ sued , resulting in five days in jail for Ginn and cofounding bassist Chuck Dukowski and an injunction prohibiting the band from releasing material under its own name . The double album Everything Went Black ? a compilation of earlier , unreleased material ? appeared from SST in 1982 without the band 's name on it . Unicorn 's bankruptcy in 1983 freed the band from the injunction .

Following the release of Damaged , Black Flag absorbed a wider range of influences , such as the doom metal of Saint Vitus ( who released via SST ) and the more experimental hardcore of Flipper , Void , and Fang . The band revisited early influences such as Black Sabbath , the MC5 , and the Stooges for new approaches to songwriting other than relying on the high speed that had become the Black Flag hallmark . In an interview in 1983 with Mark Arm the band declared its admiration for heavy metal band Dio ; when asked , " Dio ? What 's that ? " Ginn responded , " It 's Italian for God . " Ginn jealously guarded the new material , fearing other bands would capitalize on the new approach .

The band toured extensively in North American and Europe to often hostile , violent hardcore punk crowds . The disciplined group rehearsed obsessively , but there was little friendship between members : vocalist Henry Rollins was introverted and Ginn cold and demanding . Dukowski felt that Rollins ' vocal approach was better suited than that of the band 's earlier three singers to the new material he was writing such as " I Love You " and " My War " . Dukowski , who also wrote poetry and fiction , encouraged Rollins to write as well , and Rollins found inspiration in Dukowski 's bleak lyrical style .

The band recorded a set of ten demo tracks at Total Access studios in 1982 for a planned follow

@-@ up to Damaged on which Chuck Biscuits replaced Damaged drummer Robo . The rest of the lineup consisted of Ginn and former vocalist Dez Cadena on guitars , Rollins on vocals , and Dukowski on bass . The band explored new sounds on these tracks , which tended to feature a riff @-@ heavy heavy @-@ metal edge and noisy , energetic free guitar soloing from Ginn . The album never materialized , and the heavily bootlegged demos have never been officially released ; re @-@ recordings of several of the tracks from the session were to feature on My War and other later albums . The line @-@ up did not last long ? frustrated with the band 's legal troubles , Biscuits left in December 1982 , replaced by Bill Stevenson , and in 1983 Cadena left to form DC3 . Ginn had been frustrated with Dukowski 's sense of rhythm , and in Germany during a European tour in 1983 gave Dukowski an ultimatum to quit , or Ginn himself would leave . Dukowski left the band , but stayed on to co @-@ run SST .

With Unicorn 's demise in 1983 Black Flag was able to release the material they had written since 1981 . Eager to get back in the studio but still without a bassist , Ginn took on bass duties under the pseudonym " Dale Nixon " and practiced the new material with Stevenson up to eight hours a day , teaching the drummer to slow down and let the rhythm " ooze out " at a pace Stevenson was unused to ; the band called this approach the " socialist groove " , as all beats were equally spaced . With Spot as producer and \$ 200 @,@ 000 in debt , Ginn , Rollins , and Stevenson headed to the studio to record My War .

= = Music = =

The dark music on My War lacks the humor and fist @-@ pumping anthems that lightened up Damaged ? no longer the snotty @-@ nosed punk approach of the Keith Morris era , the band now focused on gloom , depression , defeatism , and aggression . The sides on the original LP divide the tracks into stylistic halves . The first half features five tracks of high @-@ powered hardcore punk and closes with a noisy freak @-@ out , " The Swinging Man " . Dukowski penned the opening title track . Ginn 's " Can 't Decide " follows , a gloomy ode to frustration : " I conceal my feelings / So I don 't have to explain / What I can 't explain anyway " . " Beat My Head Against the Wall " rails at conformity and the band 's experience with a major label : " Swimming in the mainstream / Is such a lame , lame dream " . Dukowski 's " I Love You " parodies pop ballads with lyrics of violence and dysfunction in a relationship gone wrong . Ginn and Rollins share credit on the metallic " Forever Time " and the noisy " Swinging Man " .

Three tracks that each clock at over six minutes make up the second half . Each is in a plodding Black Sabbath @-@ esque sludge metal style with ponderous lyrics of unrelenting self @-@ hate . On " Three Nights " Rollins compares himself to feces stuck to his shoe : " And I 've been grinding that stink into the dirt / For a long time now " . Against a slow , heavy , start @-@ and @-@ stop bass riff and a constant drum thudding , Rollins closes " Scream " with a bellow after delivering the Ginn @-@ penned lines : " I may be a big baby / But I 'll scream in your ear / ' Til I find out / Just what it is I am doing here " .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Black Flag toured the My War material from March 1984 , with the Nig @-@ Heist and Meat Puppets as opening acts . It had been a year since the band had toured , and Rollins , Ginn , and Stevenson had grown out their hair ; punks associated long hair was with the hippies they loathed and found it dissonant with Rollins ' accepted image as a hardcore skinhead . My War polarized Black Flag fans ; it alienated those who wanted the band to stay true to its simple hardcore roots and who were put off by the length of the songs , the riff @-@ heaviness , and the solos ? elements widely thought of as un @-@ punk . Tim Yo disparaged the album in Maximumrocknroll , saying " it sounds like Black Flag doing an imitation of Iron Maiden imitating Black Flag on a bad day " , and called the B @-@ side " sheer torture " . Howard Hampton at the Boston Phoenix called My War " unbearably boring ... resorting to standard [ heavy metal ] machinations " .

My War was the first of four Black Flag releases in 1984 , a year that also saw Family Man , Slip It

In , and Live ' 84 appear from SST . It is considered to have helped usher in post @-@ hardcore along with such releases as Hüsker Dü 's Zen Arcade and Minutemen 's Double Nickels on the Dime the same year .

The muffled sound of the album 's production has attracted criticism ; Stevie Chick disparaged the lack of character in Ginn 's bass @-@ playing on " My War " when compared to the 1982 demo of the same song with Dukowski on bass . Michael Azerrad praised the strength of the material while denigrating the " frustrating lack of ensemble feel " as the album was recorded without a full lineup . Critic Clay Jarvis commended the album , emphasizing the risks taken on it and its influence , calling it " more a test than an album " , and saying , " independent music is stronger because Black Flag formulated it " . John Dougan at AllMusic called the A @-@ side of the album " quite good " , but described the B @-@ side as " self @-@ indulgence masquerading as inspiration and about as much fun as wading through a tar pit " . Robert Christgau considered the B @-@ side a " waste " .

The album had a large influence on the hardcore @-@ meets @-@ Sabbath sounds of the Melvins , Mudhoney , and Nirvana . Mark Arm of Mudhoney related he was moved to tears at a Black Flag concert in 1983 when he was first exposed to " Nothing Left Inside " , and the experience inspired him to seek out bands like Black Sabbath . The first punk concert Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain attended was a Black Flag show during the My War tour , and he listed My War on his list of top fifty albums .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

= = = Black Flag = = =

Henry Rollins ? vocals

Greg Ginn ? guitar , bass ( as " Dale Nixon " ) , producer

Bill Stevenson ? drums , producer

= = = Technical personnel = = =

Spot ? producer , engineer , mixer

Raymond Pettibon ? artwork

= = Chart positions = =

= = = = Books = = = =

= = = = Other sources = = = =