THE ARGONAUT'S

exam week EXTRA

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**Is Metal Dead?  Hibernating?  Does Anyone Care?**

By IRA L. BELLIN
Philadelphia (AP)

It wasn't scary seeing a bare-chested Pat Boone at this year's American Music Awards wearing a leather vest and fake tassels and hyping his latest record, "In a Metal Mood."

But it was scary seeing Metallica, who had just won for favorite hard rock act, show up at the awards show looking like a bunch of clowns—with short hair, jackets and ties, and frighteningly well-manicured dispositions.

And it seemed no one cared about the reunion of notorious bad boys Motley Crue.

Does all this mean that heavy metal is dead, buried and beyond resurrection?

Maybe so.

The facts:

- MTV, after being metal's champion throughout the 1980s, won't touch it now. The cable TV station specializing in music videos canceled in "Headbanger's Ball" show in the United States three years ago after a seven-year run.

- Rock radio stations have jumped the metal ship in masse, changing to "modern rock" formats.

- Major record labels have trimmed or eliminated their metal divisions.

- The kids who once thrived on Kurt Cobain's deeply personal songs of self-doubt and despair have graduated to the anarchist industrial rock of bands like Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails and Tool.

But the most concrete evidence of metal's decline is sales figures. Bands like Def Leppard and Queenstrutch, after having multi-platinum albums in the 1980s, haven't been able to hit even platinum in the '90s.

Metal still makes up 23 percent of the market, according to SoundScan, which charts record sales.

Depending on whom you ask, there are many reasons why the metal meltdown. One theory is that heavy metal is going through a name change, from the frownd-on "metal" to the asset accepted and more comprehensible "hard music."

"If you just use the word 'metal,' I think there's no question that metal is not in vogue at all," said CMC International president Tom Lippley. "If you say 'hard music,' that covers a broad base."

Many observers say bands like Nirvana evolved from changes in the nation's mood in the aftermath of the conservative Reagan-Bush era.

"People got cynical (and) jaded, and the generations that were growing up had to express their angst," said Mary Maldenbury, vice president of marketing at Mercury Records, home of Def Leppard and Bon Jovi.

Kids could no longer identify with metal's message of power and self-confidence, according to sociologist Dennis Weinstein of DePaul University, author of "Heavy Metal A Cultural Sociology."

"I think partly why some metal lost its..."
It's not that the quality of metal music declined, either; most bands were in their mid to fourth albums and putting out their best material when the slump hit.

On the radio front, Los Angeles' revered hard rock station KNAC became a Spanish-language station several years ago. New York metal pioneer Q-104 now plays classic rock. But in Europe, Japan and Latin America, metal remains a viable force that sells well. MTV's "Headbanger's Ball" still airs. And England's renowned Cape Donnington festival draws thousands of raging metalheads each year. Roadrunner's Connor says it's because those countries are a few years behind the United States and fans there are less fickle and trendy.

Weinstein sees it differently. "They haven't bought into the "Tin Weak" thing of the American '80s teens' age," she said. "These are people whose lives have a lot more stability than our young people; they know what they're going to be when they grow up. People know that they're going to be slotted into the same social class as their parents, so the metal tradition hangs on." Despite the hell in metal's US popularity, there are many outside keeping it alive. Large independent label Roadrunner has made its name with heavy bands like Sepultura, Type O Negative, and Fear Factory and vows to stand behind them.

"Just because metal right now is not the flavor of the month, that doesn't mean it's not going to make a comeback," Roadrunner's Connor said. CMC, a 6-year-old independent label based in Bethesda, North Carolina, and distributed by BMG, is a haven for hometown '80s pop-metal bands like Slaughter, Warrant and Dokken and has become the new home of three well-regarded metal pioneers — Motörhead, Deep Purple and Iron Maiden. It sells anywhere from 40,000 to 200,000 copies of its various artists.

"There a lot of indicators that there's a slight turn back toward what I call arena rock, whether it's hard, soft, heavy, or in between," said CMC's Lipke Mercus's Maudsberg agrees.

"The mood with (U.S. President Bill Clinton) in office and people feeling better about the economy... all creates room of an upbeat, less antagonistic, less cynical view of what's happening," he said. "That feeds right into what Jon Bon Jovi and Def Leppard are doing."

Century Media has put out two Judas Priest tribute albums and signed several young European headliners. Sweden's Tristan, who toured the United States with Black Sabbath several years ago, in their biggest sellers, with sales around 150,000 worldwide. "Metal has always had its peaks and valleys," said Connor's Barbieri. "It's kind of a good time (now) because it needs out a lot of the people that really aren't into it, whether it's the bands or the companies...because there's not a lot of profit to be made."

In Chicago, programmer Scott Davidson is mounting a single-handed effort to get metal back on the radio. He co-founded Rebel Radio in 1994, which airs on FM (WVVS) and AM (WVTA) bands and on the Internet. Rebel Radio plays new and classic metal, new and established bands.

And in fans are varied. "Everyone thinks heavy metal is the teen-age kid in a black T-shirt," said Davidson, who plays drums in his own metal band, Stonehenge. "I disagree. We have at least six or seven different police forces listening, which really surprised me, but a lot of them grew up on this stuff. It's a wide variety." He's comfortable with metal's current status.

"I really don't want to see metal in the mainstream," he said. "I want to see it still more and I want to see more bands come out and do better, (but) I don't want to see it sell out either."

And he is, in a perverse way, grateful for the Fug Boome album. "It's terrible, but it's just bringing the same metal back into the picture," he said.

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MORE COFFEE, HON?  
DECADeS AFTER DINER BOOM, MYSTIQUE STILL HOLDS

BY ROBIN ESTREN

There's something about a diner. Steaming cups of coffee, steaming platters of bacon, eggs and hash, shiny stainless steel and swiveling bar seats combine for a mystique that still captures the imagination, and the appetite. Diners have always fed legions of contented fans. But for many of today's patrons—many of them too young to remember the diner boom of the 1940s and 50s—the diner is more than just good food; it's a cultural institution.

And, decades after their heyday, more and more of them are being preserved as such. "They're like an icon of America," said Beth Lennos, 30, of Medford, who estimates she has eaten in about 50 diners. Diners have been going through something of a renaissance over the last few years. News that an old diner is being built or restored is enough to rally a community. Weathered diners are being meticulously restored. And diner manufacturers are getting inquiries about which ones they haven't seen in decades.

"There's definitely a greater general awareness of diners as being historical artifacts," said Randy Garbin, who publishes Roadside, a quarterly magazine devoted to the culture of the Worcester-style, diner, a railroad-type model manufactured here for generations. The city boasts the nation's largest number of diners in any American city, behind New York and Philadelphia, Garbin said.

New Jersey, however, maintains the record for the most diners in any state. Many of them—the old as well as the new—are owned by Greeks. And with good reason, said Jimmy Philis, owner of the Athena Diner in Trenton, N.J.

When Philis came here from Greece 27 years ago, he didn't speak the language. So, like many other Greek immigrants, he worked in diners that were owned by his countrymen.
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The food is good and it’s so relaxing,” he said, as he finished up his breakfast special and fifth cup of coffee at the counter one morning. “It makes one feel like you want to come back again, which I do.”
the summer arg is coming...

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